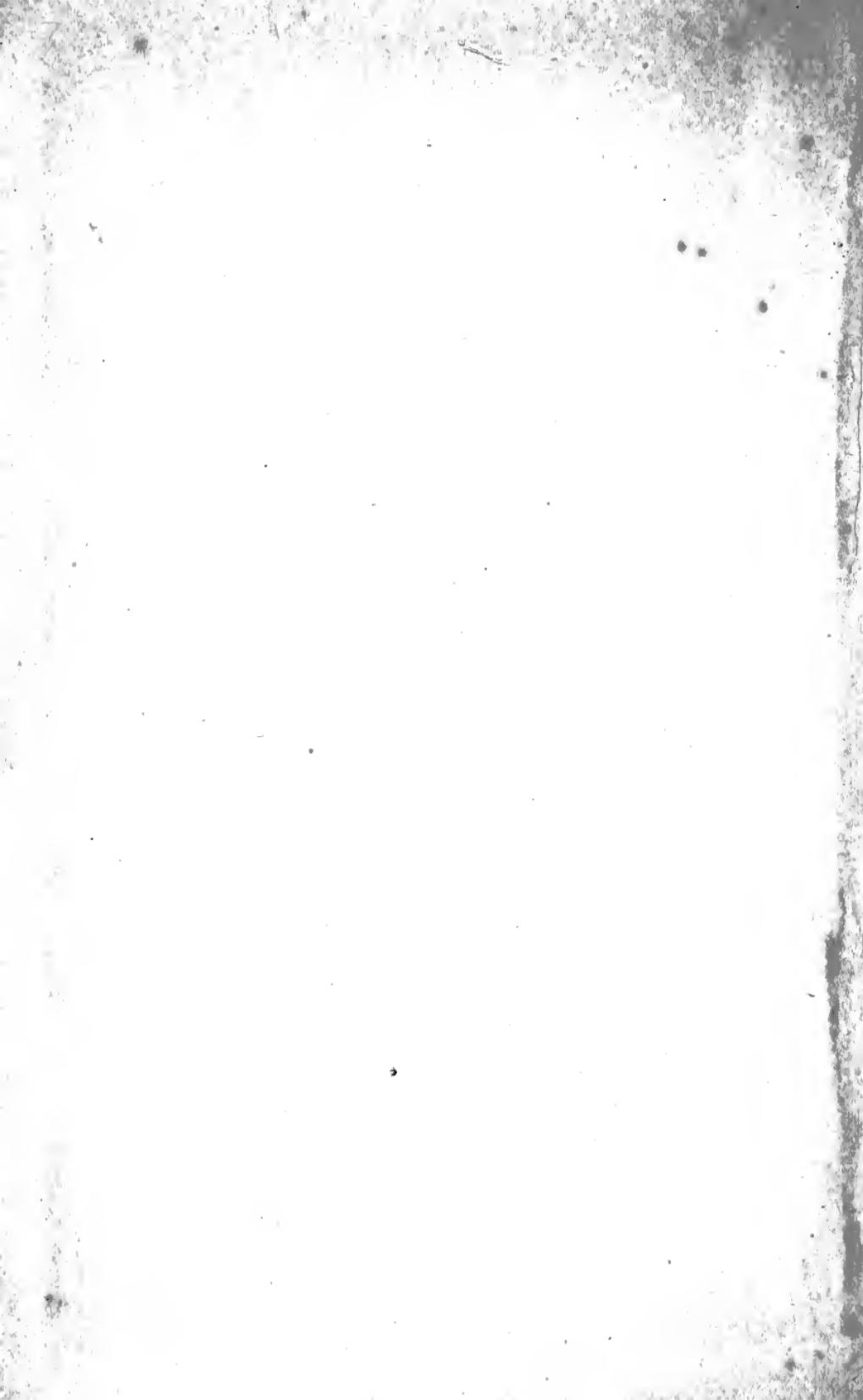


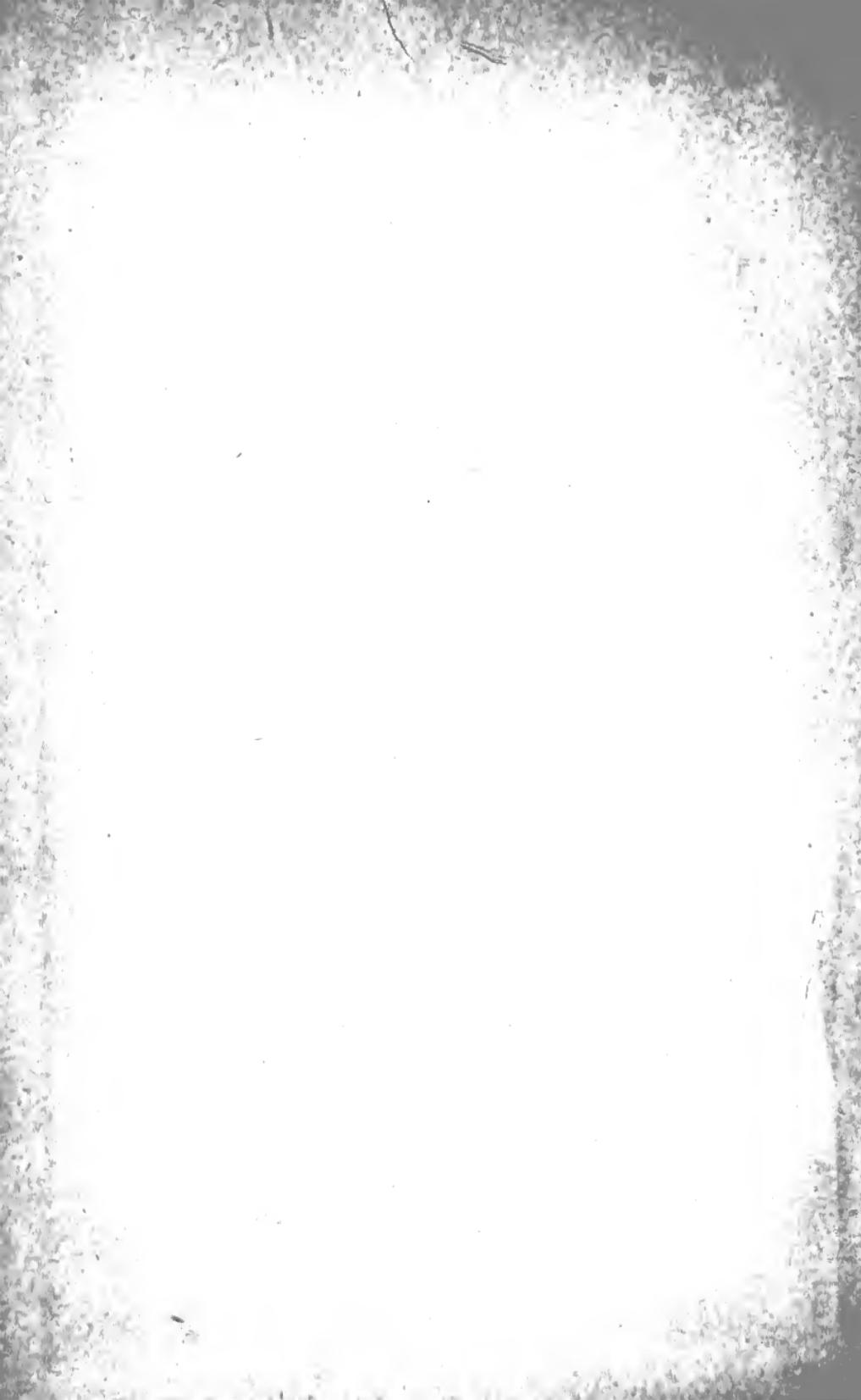
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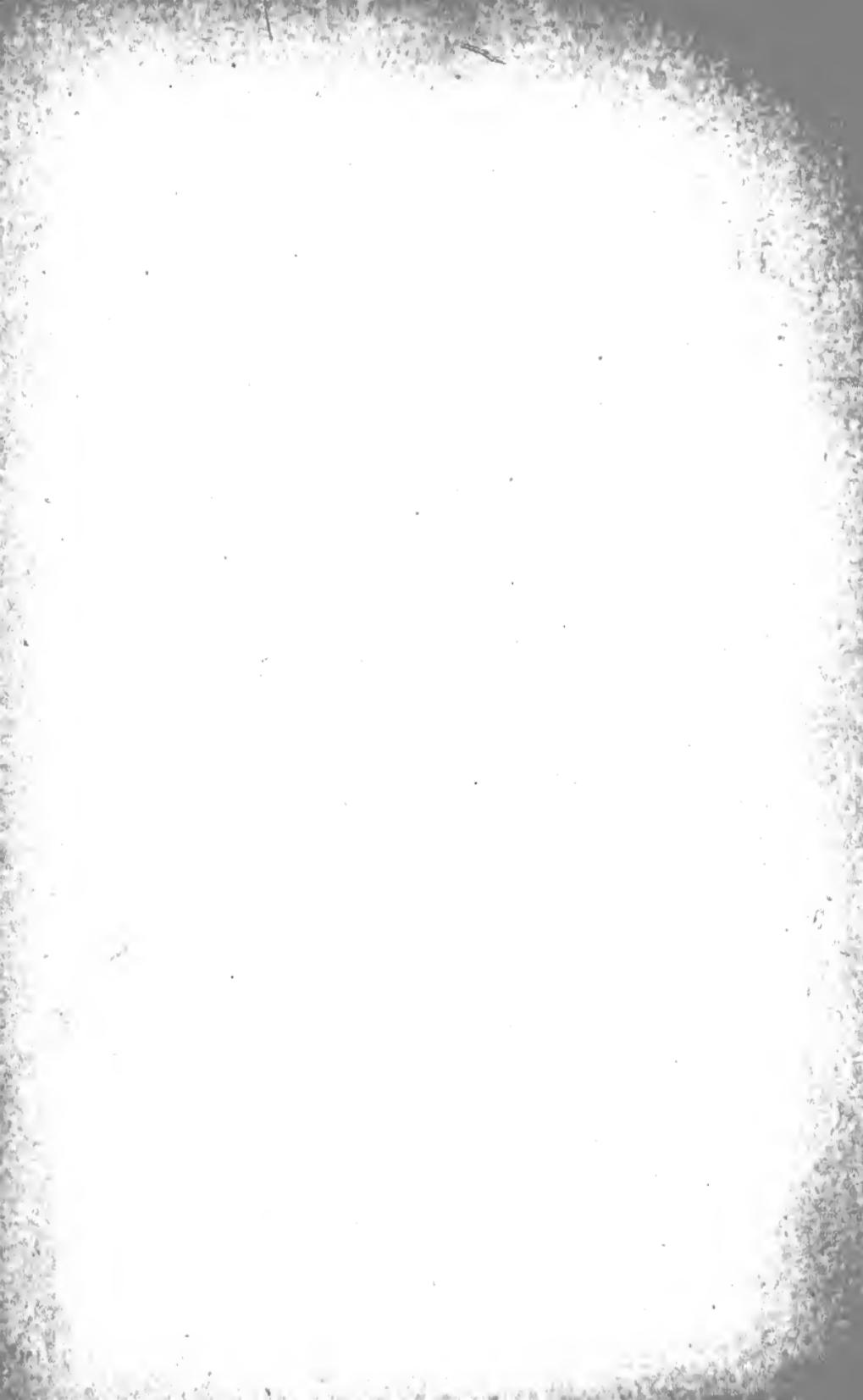




THE

HEIR OF THE AGES

III.



THE  
HEIR OF THE AGES

BY  
JAMES PAYN

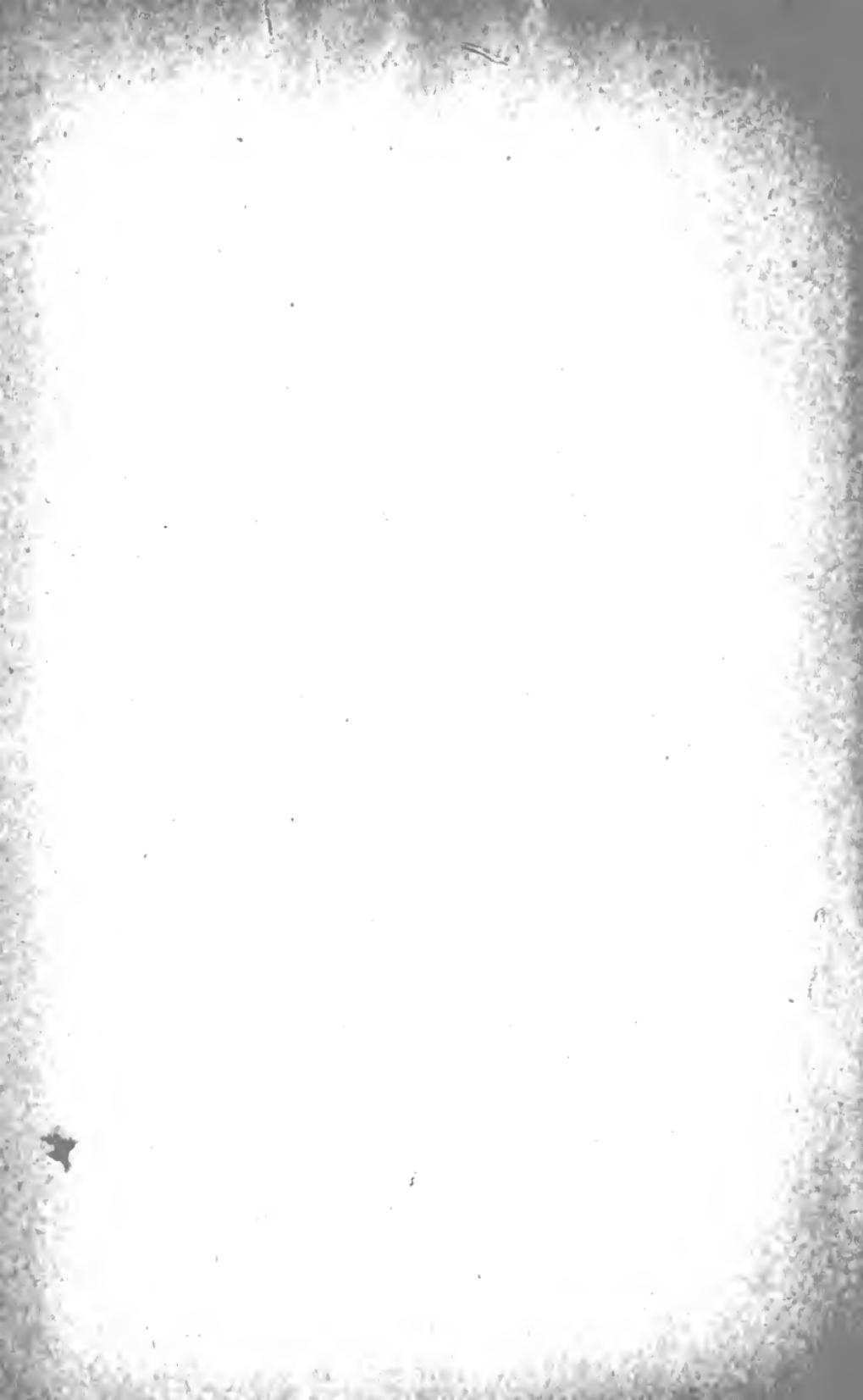
AUTHOR OF 'BY PROXY' ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. III.

LONDON  
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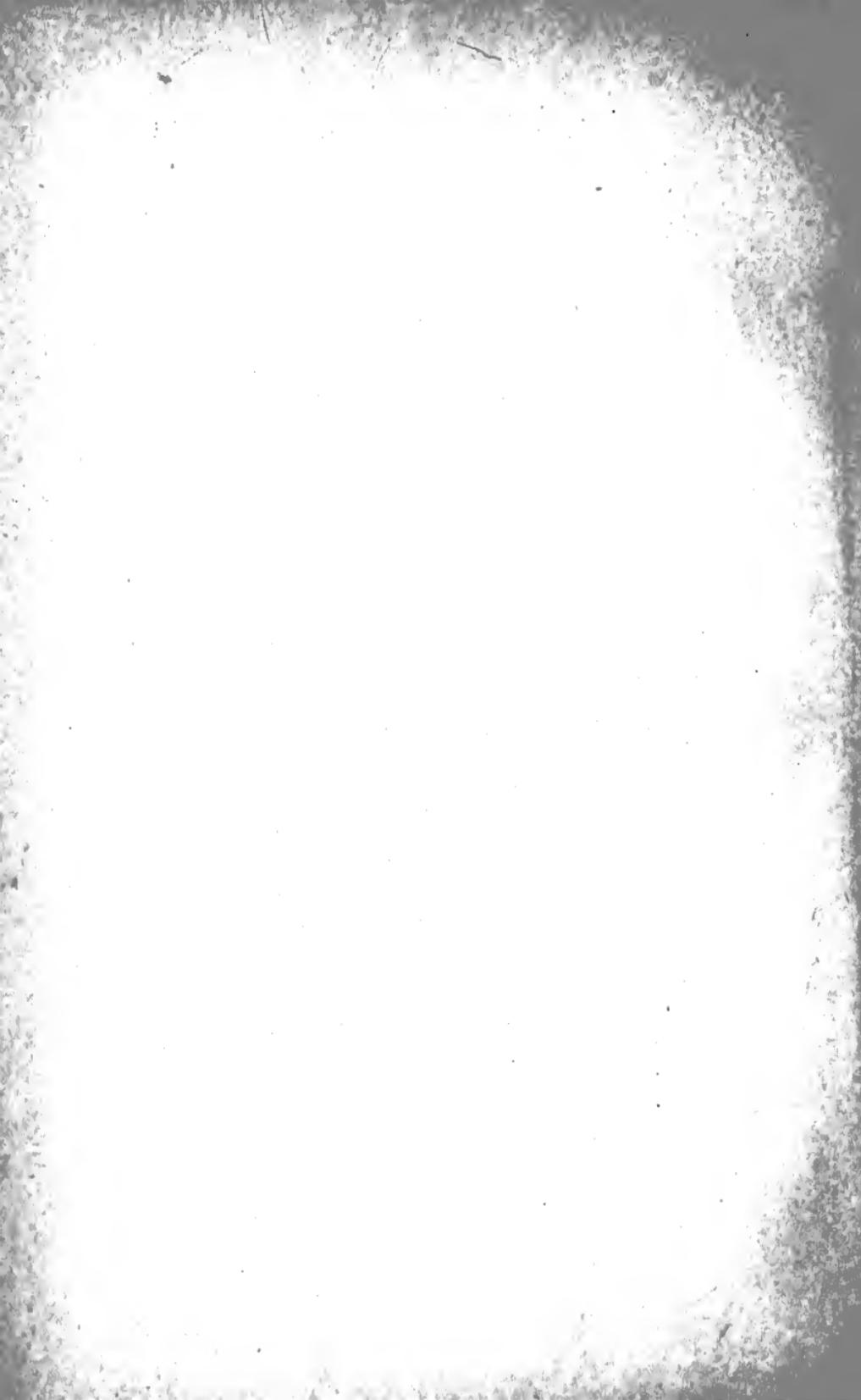
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THE  
HEIR OF THE AGES.

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CHAPTER XXXIV.

‘THE PUBLIC GOOD.’

‘WELL, my dear,’ said Mrs. Richter, as she and her niece pursued their way homeward, ‘and what do you think of it all?’

‘I am very glad I have seen Mr. Argand, and much obliged to you for doing what, I fear, must have been little short of a penance for my sake.’

‘You mean the “at-home”; well, that was certainly rather trying. The idea of hearing you discussed in that manner, some of them even suggesting that you were a man! But I had really almost forgotten the “at-home.” Do

you know that you have been talking to Mr. Argand exactly one hour and a half ?'

' You should rather say he has been talking to me.'

' I suppose so. He looked, however, very much interested in what you were saying.'

' He is most kind and sympathetic ; his ears are open to everything, even to what I told him about Mr. Matthew Meyrick.'

' And as to your own affairs—I mean the "Millennium," and so on,' put in Aunt Jane, hastily, like one who is afraid of misinterpretation, or having gone too far.

' He has taken all I proposed into his most favourable consideration. I have got what it does not fall to every one to get—my chance.'

' I am so glad you are pleased, dear.'

The congratulation did not move Lizzie the less because it was clear that Aunt Jane did not comprehend the cause of her satisfaction. ' I do not understand : I love ' is a motto not only applicable to wives.

‘And you? I am afraid you did not find the time pass so agreeably with Miss Argand. She struck me as a little cold.’

‘She was very communicative and confidential with me, nevertheless, my dear, I do assure you.’

‘Indeed.’

‘Yes; I thought rather unnecessarily so. She took great pains to impress upon me that Mr. Argand had nothing but the profits of his magazine to live upon; and that he was very ambitious.’

‘That is quite true,’ returned Lizzie, gently; ‘he gave me to understand as much himself; that is the only thing that somehow disappointed me in him; he wants to get into Parliament.’

‘Oh, dear; oh, dear,’ sighed Mrs. Richter.

‘There is nothing so disgraceful in it,’ laughed Lizzie, ‘that you should distress yourself about it; but it seems to me a small aspiration for such a nature. However, every one to his taste. I dare say there would be many, if it was worth their while, to pick

holes in mine. Aunt Jane, I am going to ask you a great favour.'

' My dear, I wish I had one to grant you.'

' But you have. I want you to go about with me wherever I can't go by myself.'

' Any more "at-homes" ?' inquired Aunt Jane, in the tone of one who is anxious to know the worst.

' No ; it is nothing of that kind.'

' Then I am prepared to go to gaol with you if it is necessary,' was the cheerful reply.

' Certainly, we must see the gaols ; also the courts of law that lead to them ; the hospitals, the docks, the slums——'

' The what ?' inquired Mrs. Richter, with amazement.

' The dwellings of the poorest of the poor. I want to see everything, and Mr. Argand has promised to put me in the way of doing it.'

' Very good, my dear ; I only hope,' added the widow, in a resigned whisper, ' we shall not be robbed and murdered.'

In after years, when one of these two ladies had become a celebrity, this incident

was misrecorded in the usual wicked fashion. There were even humorous pictures of the audacious pair engaged in putting their design into execution, borrowed from the designs of the once famous ‘Tom and Bob’ seeing ‘Life in London’; a tribute to her niece’s popularity which, one is glad to think, never met Mrs. Richter’s eyes. The subject was one which not only lent itself to illustration, but, naturally enough, awakened ridicule. Miss Dart’s scheme of research was no doubt crude ; still, those who would paint from life must draw from the living model, and the eye of genius can seize at a glance more than the more commonplace vision can grasp in a lifetime. Simple as was her plan, it would not have been easy of execution but for Mr. Argand’s assistance. He had an ‘open sesame’ for most doors, and placed it, as he had promised, at his fair contributor’s disposal. She sat beside the judge upon the bench, and visited the criminal in his cell ; she plumbed the depths of misery into which the poor are plunged, and in ministering, so

far as she was able, to their needs, partook of their rare enjoyments ; she did not shrink even from beholding those sharp and terrible remedies with which the surgeon seems to mock humanity in granting to it a new lease of existence.

Nor was the brighter side of life neglected : not only did she visit the usual haunts of pleasure, but often enjoyed what had hitherto been utterly unknown to her—the intellectual feast. At Mr. Argand's table she met what his sister was wont to describe as ‘everybody’ —a term which is seldom quite so comprehensive as the user would have it understood, but which in this case was, at least, tolerably wide. She met poets, statesmen, critics, doctors, lawyers—all of whom had achieved for themselves more or less of reputation. Her good looks were a sufficient passport to their attention ; but she talked but little to them. Upon the whole, perhaps, their conversation disappointed her. She missed the enthusiasm of Matthew Meyrick, and the earnestness of Roger Leyden. They seemed

wanting in originality, or perhaps had lost, in the grinding of the social mill, ‘the picturesque of man and man.’

But she was entirely at her ease with them. Her paper in the ‘Millennium’ was as completely forgotten as though it had never been written ; no one wonders to see a pretty girl at any table, whether there is anything in her or not. Miss Argand, though stiff in her manner, was always polite. Lizzie did not ‘get on’ with her, but there was nothing to find fault with in her as a hostess ; she was what very few people were with whom she came into anything like close contact—an enigma to her. What also puzzled her, with respect to this lady, was the silence which Aunt Jane maintained about her. It was probable, Lizzie thought, that she disliked her, but, from her disinclination to make mischief, preferred to keep her thoughts to herself. Nor was Mr. Argand himself quite so intelligible to her as on first acquaintance she had thought him to be. His kindness to her was unremitting, and

was exhibited to her in a thousand ways ; but there was something of reserve in his manner for which she could not account. He had also moods of depression, which, she had her suspicion, were connected with business affairs ; but, on the other hand, he always spoke of the 'Millennium' as a financial success. 'It has got a firm hold of the public mind,' he once said of it ; 'and with such a sheet-anchor one ought to ride out any ordinary gale.'

She wondered what sort of a gale it was of whose rising he stood in fear ; but the tone in which he had spoken of it did not encourage inquiry. To see Mr. Argand sad gave her great discomfort ; but this did not often happen. She had plenty to do, and plenty to think about, and no apprehension for the future. She enjoyed, in short, that *summum bonum* of the diligent soul—work without worry. The time passed only too quickly. She discovered, for the first time, that life was full of happiness.

It was her practice to get up early, and

work with her pen for an hour or two before breakfast ; what she was doing, Aunt Jane never inquired into, but only devoutly hoped that it was not a new treatise on the works of Apollinaris. It was marvellous how Lizzie had managed to describe Casterton in so entertaining a manner ; and perhaps she would be able to invest the Marylebone Road with a similar interest. Literature had a very limited horizon for Mrs. Richter, but she knew that her niece stood on a far higher standpoint, and must needs see much further. She had an immense admiration for her talents, without much confidence in the material results which were likely to flow from them ; and this made her very reticent about her niece’s literary work.

Lizzie’s astonishment may be imagined, therefore, when one morning her aunt, who had been making the tea as usual, while she herself was busy at her desk, suddenly inquired, in a tone of mingled interest and deprecation, ‘ My dear child, who on earth is John Javelin ? ’

For the moment Lizzie thought that the remark was a personal one ; indeed, it was as much through chance as through Mrs. Richter's native simplicity that up to that moment the widow had never associated her with that name. Miss Argand had taken it for granted that she knew her niece wrote under that pseudonym ; but Lizzie, as we know, had purposely concealed the fact from her.

‘John Javelin ? He is a writer in the “Millennium,”’ replied Miss Dart, quietly. ‘What about him ?’

‘Well, there is a good deal about him : two columns in this newspaper about him. I hope it will not do the “Millennium” any harm ; but Mr. Argand seems to have got hold of a very queer contributor.’

‘I have not seen the “Millennium” yet ; it only comes out to-day ; but I suppose it is sent to the newspapers in advance.’

‘Well, the “Times” has got it, at all events, and Mr. Javelin has “got it” too, in another sense. Oh, my dear Lizzie, how glad I am it is not you ; not, of course, that

you would ever dream of writing such an article, speaking evil of dignities, or, at all events, speaking of them in an irreverent way, and so audacious from beginning to end !’

‘ Dear me,’ observed Lizzie, with an irrepressible twinkle in her eyes ; ‘ how shocking !’

‘ Well, of course you feel bound to stick up for the “Millennium” ; but you don’t know. When you have read the review——’

‘ Read it out to me,’ put in Lizzie, smiling ; ‘ the tea is only just made ; and you have excited my interest immensely.’

‘ I wonder what poor Mr. Argand will say ?’

‘ Is that how it begins ?’

‘ My dear Lizzie, of course not. This is how it begins’ :—

‘ It is not our custom, as our readers are aware, to pass any opinion upon the quarterly reviews. From the nature of their publication, they are mostly stately commentaries on the past, and do not concern themselves, as

it is our less agreeable task to do, with the topics of the day. Of late years, however, or, indeed, we may almost say of late months—so brief has been the existence of the periodical in question—there has appeared among this class of reviews a new candidate for public favour. It has appealed, not, as we understand, without success, to a larger audience, and has established no little reputation for originality of view. It has carefully abstained from siding with either this or that political party ; and by its wit and wisdom has recommended itself to both. To-day, however, the “Millennium” has made a new departure, though in what direction it is somewhat difficult to say. Its independence, it must be admitted, though still without any taint of Radicalism, as Radicalism is commonly understood, has taken the form of denunciation ; it lays an indictment against authority itself, and arraigns our whole social morality at the bar of conscience. The matter seems deserving of some notice, not only from the status of the “Millennium” itself, but from the

boldness and vigour of the article in question, which, under the somewhat ambitious title of “The Public Good,” deals with the entire fabric of society. It is evident that the writer, who signs himself John Javelin, is not one of those who, while they are rarely so imprudent as to name a date, avow their belief in the “Good Old Times”; yet he insists that there were days—

When none were for a party,  
But all were for the State,

or, at all events, when the public interest was held of more consequence, and the duties of citizenship were inculcated more generally, than at present.

“In these days,” he says, “our duty to the State is the very last thing which is considered, even by moderately honest folks. Men that would not wrong their neighbour of a shilling have little scruple in making a false return of their income to the tax-gatherers. I have observed of late years that even those notifications in the newspapers from the Chancellor of the Exchequer concerning conscience

money have disappeared ; the few people who had some lingering scruple in that way having apparently died out. Taxes of all kinds are looked upon in a totally different light from other debts, and the very last light in which they are viewed is that of debts of honour ; to elude them is considered far from shameful, at worst as venial, at best as a clever stroke of business. This arises not so much from want of patriotism as from habit and example. For many generations the State has been looked upon as a milch cow by both political parties, the members of which have got all they could out of it for their families and supporters as a matter of course, without the idea ever crossing their minds that they were robbing the Commonwealth.

“ “ There is also another reason for this general unscrupulousness. It is much more easy to do our duty to our neighbour than to society at large. A board, or company, is considered fair game for deception ; gentlemen, and especially gentlewomen, will pay half-fares

for their children, when they travel by railway, long after they have passed the specified age. It does not strike them as a fraud, and even when discovered they are not overwhelmed with shame as they would be if caught cheating at cards. That ‘fortuitous combination of atoms,’ the Government, is regarded in the same way. When a man dies, his heirs underrate the value of his property to diminish the probate duty ; and, even in the hour of death, he will not seldom make some adroit disposal of it so as to elude the public due. Surely these things ought not so to be. It was, indeed, concerning modern times that the poet wrote, ‘The individual withers, and the world is more and more,’ but, as a matter of fact, the individual is very far from withering ; while the world, as represented by his neighbours, grows of less and less account with him.”

‘The writer admits, indeed, that public spirit is not dead, and pays due honour to those societies which have been formed to defend popular rights (as, for example, in respect to

open spaces in the neighbourhood of our towns) from private encroachment, but maintains that the rights of property have become so sacred that the very *raison d'être* of property is lost sight of. He holds the law itself to be blameworthy in the matter, and points out how the private wrong is always dealt with in our courts more severely than the offence against the State.

“To rob a fine lady's jewel-drawer is a much more dangerous experiment than to break open a poor-box. The fact of the contents of the latter being for the poor—a common trust, which every citizen is capable of understanding—is never taken into account. To deface a statue in a private garden would be an offence punished at least as severely—probably more so—than the defilement of a public fountain out of what is strangely called ‘pure mischief,’ but which, in reality, arises from a hateful hostility to the general convenience. If the public good was the object of public interest that it ought to be, such offences would be treated with exceptional

severity ; but at present, not only is everybody's business nobody's business, but everybody's property is regarded with far less solicitude than if it belonged to the individual.

“ The same neglect of the public good is manifest, even as regards personal security. That odious and noxious weed, the ‘rough,’ is allowed to have his way with us in a manner unheard of save on the very outskirts of civilisation. It has been complained, by those who suffer from him, that the law would put him down quickly enough if those who make the law were in a position to feel his brutality : as matters are, thousands of helpless persons have a hard life made still less durable for them by these brutal scoundrels. One who knows life well has written of the rough that ‘his conscience is the cat-o'-nine-tails’ ; but our sentimentalists (who are well out of the reach of his fists) are ready to faint at the notion of administering the lash to him ; they think it will ‘harden’ his gentle nature. As it is manifest we cannot always keep our roughs locked up, I will suggest a

method of getting rid of them and, at the same time, of utilising those virtues which they are supposed by the sanguine to possess. On their second offence, let them be placed in a regiment composed entirely of the same class, and officered by persons who are accustomed to deal with it. Whenever we are at war—as we almost always are with some ‘most favoured nation’ or another—let that regiment be first on the rota for foreign service. The superfluous physical energies, which are at present occupied in beating women and children, or inoffensive passers-by, will then be worthily employed; these gentry, who have been termed ‘soldiers in the wrong place,’ will then be in the right place, and have the opportunity afforded them of distinguishing themselves; they will literally have left their country ‘for their country’s good’—a phrase which for years has been only used with reference to transportation, and has now no signification at all.”

‘It is not only the law itself, however, but the administrators of the law, whom (with

exceptions, however) the writer in the “Millennium” charges with being the cause of this state of affairs :—

“ It would seem, indeed, from the sentences of most of our criminal judges, that the very last thing they have in their mind is the public good. It is probable that the upper classes are not aware of the widespread prevalence of cruelty and brutality in England at the present day. I notice that such cases are commonly excluded from the daily papers —on the ground, I suppose, of their being too painful in their details. It has been written, however, by a good and wise woman that ‘we can surely bear to read about what other people have to endure’ ; and, at the risk of a little shuddering, I think it would be well if some of our kid-gloved gentry would buy some weekly paper for a penny next week, and cast their eye over the narratives—for they are sure to be there—of cruelty and wrong inflicted upon women and children, and other helpless persons, with the punishments, or rather the encouragements, awarded

to the perpetrators. One English judge, indeed, who knew the subject on which he was writing, has given his opinion of these wretches, and how they should be dealt with. 'They are not men at all,' he says, 'in any moral sense: they are human tigers, and ought to be extirpated like the wild beasts they are.' The punishment of death awarded to murderers may often be too severe: a murder may be committed in an uncontrollable fit of passion, and under great provocation. But there are criminals infinitely more dangerous to the public good than your mere murderer, and who should be punished at least as severely, but who, under present circumstances, receive terms of imprisonment, often infamously short, from which they emerge to make life intolerable to all who are in their power. It is admitted by the professors of every creed that to decrease the sum of human misery should be the aim of all men; whereas these creatures deliberately set themselves to work to increase it; while Justice looking on with folded hands, and

milk-and-water humanitarianism, under the *alias* of philanthropy, pleads not for the victim, but for the tyrant.”

“Indeed,” this writer goes on to say, “what class of our fellow-countrymen are taught their duties to the State as a commonwealth? In those exclusive seminaries of learning where that mysterious and expensive article ‘the tone’ is supposed to be obtained, there is, indeed, some occasional reference in the educational course to the public good, but it is always in a dead language; and my experience is that dead languages do not, upon the average mind, create much impression. And yet it might be thought that in schools frequented by the flower of British youth who, in manhood, need not occupy themselves as others have to do in getting the means of livelihood, the science of the public good should be particularly studied. As for the other places where youths are educated, I do not know that our duty to the community in which we live is so much as hinted at in any of them; and yet, alas! it does not come

by nature. It has been said by a bitter enemy of popular education that we now 'teach everything except the Bible'; this is, probably, an exaggeration; but cannot a superfluous 'ology' be dropped, and in its place an occasional lesson taught concerning the duties of citizenship? In the next generation, then, it may perhaps be held that to cheat the State is as bad as to cheat one's neighbour; that will be, at least, a step in the right direction, though far indeed from the true faith once prevalent—now all but dead—that the highest good is the public good.'

'These are stirring words, and we are far from saying that they are wholly uncalled for. It is a pity, however, that the writer sometimes allows his zeal, which is considerable, to outrun his discretion. The following, for example, strikes us, to say the least of it, as audacious :—'

“To judge by the way in which it is commonly spoken of, our very form of Government would seem to have become of more

consequence than the commonwealth itself, for which governments exist at all. An English Admiral, engaged on what was then a national duty—fighting the Dutch—was informed, while at sea, that his country had changed its form of Government, and was asked what he proposed to do? ‘Do?’ he answered, ‘I shall do my duty to my country.’ He was the last man, however, of the grand old times. Everybody who was killed in battle in later days was described as having died for his ‘King and Country.’ Our Government being Constitutional, he should more accurately have been said to have died for ‘King, Lords, Commons, and Country’ ; and even then the phrase would be open to the objection of putting three carts before the horse. Most of us are agreed that monarchy is the best form of government ; still, man was not made for monarchy, but the reverse. ‘*Pro patria*’ is a motto now only used by coach-builders ; but there was surely more sense in it than in that which has been substituted for it. One can hardly imagine,

for example, a man, however reckless of existence, dying for George the Fourth."

' There are many things true, some things new, and much that is good in "The Public Good," but there is also a certain fanaticism—the indignation, rather than the enthusiasm of conviction—which offends those who are accustomed to weigh their words. There is nothing personal in the paper, yet somehow it suggests much of the writer's vehemence springs from an individual wrong, which may even be his own. His denunciations have almost as much bitterness as strength in them ; and without, as we have said, being Radical, the article is intensely Democratic. In this last respect we cannot congratulate the "Millennium" on its contributor ; its line has been hitherto one of strict impartiality, from which we are sorry to see it diverge. On the other hand, it has brought to light a new ornament to literature, and yet not altogether new. The most remarkable feature in the matter is, indeed, that a paper like "The Public Good" should have proceeded from the same

hand (unknown, as far as we are aware, to fame) which gave us that exquisite picture of country life, “A Bit of Old England.”

‘Goodness gracious me, what a dreadful mistake!’ cried Mrs. Richter, shrinking from the words she had just uttered, like Fear, in Collins’s ‘Ode,’ from the noise itself had made. ‘The idea of mixing you up with that audacious Mr. Javelin! What on earth is to be done?’

‘We must bring an action for libel, I suppose,’ said Lizzie, quietly. ‘I must talk to Mr. Argand about it.’

Here the door was opened by her maid, and her voice, in the accents of Cockaigne, announced Mr. Argand himself.

## CHAPTER XXXV.

## A HALF CONFIDENCE.

‘ You have read the “Times,” I see,’ said Mr. Argand, smiling, as he shook hands with Mrs. Richter.

‘ Yes, indeed, we have,’ returned that lady, looking unutterable things.

‘ There is an article upon “The Public Good” in all the other papers,’ said the editor, complacently.

‘ Let us hope they have not fallen into the same mistake ; I call it most abominable, don’t you, Mr. Argand, that any one should confuse Lizzie with that dreadful Mr. Javelin ? ’

‘ Dear me, I had quite forgotten ! ’ cried Mr. Argand, looking at Miss Dart, with an air of ludicrous penitence. In his pleasure and excitement, it had, in fact, escaped him that

she had kept her identity with John Javelin from her aunt's knowledge.

'Forgotten it!' exclaimed Mrs. Richter. 'What, already! I am sure I shall never forget it. It is enough to make my poor husband, who was always devoted to the dear child, turn in his grave. The idea of her being "intensely Democratic!"'

'That is only a conventional phrase of disapprobation,' murmured Mr. Argand. 'One must say something depreciatory in a review.'

'Well, of course you ought to know,' said Mrs. Richter, naïvely; 'but I should be sorry indeed to see such remarks applied to anything that my niece wrote.'

'My dear,' said Lizzie, putting her arm round her aunt's little waist, and speaking very softly, 'I have a confession to make. When I first spoke to you about the "Millennium" I saw that you did not like my being the only female contributor it had, and felt that you would still less approve of my masquerading in it in male attire; but the mis-

chief—if mischief it was—had been already done. I could not screw up my courage to tell you I had adopted the signature of “John Javelin.”’

‘Mercy me!’ This was the strongest form of ejaculation in Aunt Jane’s vocabulary.

‘I am very sorry to have deceived you, but I did it for the best.’

‘I am sure you did,’ answered the little lady, gently; there was a pained expression in her kind face which found its way to her niece’s heart, and the other perceived it and regretted it, like one who finds an arrow from her own bow in the heart of a friend. ‘But, my darling, it does not signify,’ she added, with inexpressible tenderness. ‘I am a foolish old woman who, as you rightly concluded, should not be intrusted with State secrets.’

‘It wasn’t that,’ said Lizzie, earnestly; ‘I only wished to save you pain.’

‘I know it, my dear;’ and she cast a glance at the newspaper, which she still held

in her hand, as much as to say, ‘It is not you who have pained me, but this abominable print.’

Mr. Argand saw his opportunity, and seized the skirts of happy chance. ‘My dear Mrs. Richter,’ he interposed, ‘is it possible you have not read “The Public Good”? I should have thought you were the very last person to condemn a fellow-creature without trial. Here is a copy of the “Millennium” which contains this terrible paper; please take it, and judge for yourself.’

She held her hand out with a gratified look, and left the room without a word.

‘How very, very sorry I am!’ exclaimed Miss Dart, regretfully. ‘I am afraid she is wounded by my want of confidence in her.’

‘Not so,’ said Mr. Argand, confidently. ‘She is only distressed at having expressed herself unfavourably of your production. She will come back as great an admirer of John Javelin as of yourself; and in so doing, my dear Miss Dart, she will show her judgment;

I cannot tell you how delighted I am with the reception of your paper. It almost reconciles one with the critics. I have never known an article in a quarterly attract so much attention. Moreover—and this I know will gratify you more than anything else—I am convinced it will do great good.'

'I hope it will do some good to the "Millennium," at all events, said Lizzie, deprecatingly.

'It will do it an immense deal of good. But I am not always thinking of the "Millennium," I do assure you. You have already made two sensations; do you know that in our literary weights and measures three sensations make a reputation?'

'You are always so kind and encouraging, Mr. Argand.'

'To be encouraging is a natural branch of my business,' he replied; 'though I seldom find such modest depreciation as in your case. Authors nowadays generally know their own value. Indeed, they are apt to value their productions at a fancy price.'

‘That is the effect of imagination ; you see, I am not a writer of fiction.’

‘No ; I wish you were. What you told me about yourself with respect to that matter was a disappointment to me. Now, if you could only have written novels ——’

‘Well, what then? You don’t publish novels in the “Millennium”?’

‘I wish, my dear young lady, you would not fall into that habit of supposing that I am always thinking of my—well, of myself—for that is what it comes to.’

‘I should be most ungrateful if I thought anything of the kind,’ she answered, earnestly. ‘There is, however, surely no harm in your love for your own child, as Miss Argand calls it.

‘You must not believe everything my sister says about me,’ he answered, slowly walking up and down the room. ‘She is an excellent woman, and is, I am well aware, devoted to me and my interests ; but she does not entirely understand me. I am not the literary machine which she would lead you to imagine. I have

really *some* human feelings.' He spoke in a tone of annoyance, which she had never before heard him use, and which surprised her very much.

'It is difficult to make ourselves understood, even by our nearest and dearest,' she replied. 'I have the same difficulty, in my little way, with Aunt Jane.'

'Has my sister ever spoken to you confidentially about my affairs?' he asked, abruptly.

'Certainly not. It was not a thing to be expected, in any case.'

'Why do you say, in any case?' he put in, sharply. 'Do you mean that she is not confidential to you at all?'

'Well, she naturally prefers to make Aunt Jane, who is more of the same age, rather than myself, her confidante.'

'Then you hear everything all the same, though you hear it at second hand?' he said, stopping in his walk and regarding her with keen attention.

'It is true that Aunt Jane and I have no

secrets from each other, except this one,' she answered lightly, pointing to the newspaper, with its review ; ' but I do assure you, Miss Argand was very discreet. She has disclosed no secrets of the prison-house, in connection with profits or circulation.'

'There, again !' he cried, with irritation : ' why do you always associate me with my Review—as if I were a man made of proof-sheets, instead of flesh and blood ?'

'Nay ; were you not yourself speaking of your own "affairs," which it was reasonable for me to identify with those of the "Millennium ?"

He glanced at her with suspicion, which, even while he looked, seemed to fade away and give place to his usual frankness of expression.

'That is very true,' he said ; ' and, after all, it is only natural that Joanna should gossip about it. I hope she told you, or rather your aunt, that the Review is doing very well, and especially that we have sold more of the number that had your article in it than of any other.'

‘She did not do so ; but I am delighted to hear it. I can fancy few things more satisfactory than the continuous success of a literary organ of one’s own creation.’

‘It is very pleasant, no doubt ; and certainly I have nothing to complain of with respect to the “Millennium.” Success, however, is a relative term ; and it is impossible, with our material, to appeal to any very extensive public.’

‘You mean, of course, that it flies over the heads of the million. To me, indeed, who have only lately known the million, it seems a marvel that you succeed as you do.’

‘Well, since what readers we have are for the most part well-to-do people, advertisers are glad to patronise us, you see ; and advertisements are the life-blood of a periodical. Nevertheless, what I desire above all things is a great circulation. A first-rate and original novel might possibly obtain it.’

‘I cannot imagine how people can like to read novels bit by bit.’

‘ That is what everybody says, yet no magazine can command a large circle of subscribers, without a serial novel ; even the newspapers are adopting the same means of attracting their readers. The appetite for fiction is enormous, and grows by what it feeds on. Unhappily, good fiction is as rare as ever, but that is the fillip I want for the “ Millennium.” ’

‘ It appears to me, Mr. Argand,’ said Miss Dart, smiling, ‘ that, if not ungrateful, you are at least a little unreasonable in your expectations. If the “ Millennium ” were struggling for existence the case would be different ; as it is, you remind me of the dinner guest in “ Punch,” who tells his hostess that, though not hungry, he is happy to say he is greedy.’

‘ A very just rebuke,’ he observed, gravely, ‘ but, unhappily, one that comes too late.’

‘ How so ?’

‘ Well, one’s habits get ingrained, you see,’ he answered ; ‘ I am ambitious. Through ambition Cæsar fell.’

‘He didn’t want to get into Parliament, however,’ said Miss Dart, slyly.

‘Ah, it was foolish of me to let you into that secret,’ he said, smiling. ‘I feel it has given you a low opinion of me.’

‘Nothing could ever give me that, Mr. Argand,’ she answered, confidently.

His face for an instant glowed with pleasure; then clouded over with an intense sadness.

‘The good opinion of those we respect is welcome to us,’ he said, ‘even when it is undeserved. I shall never betray any of my weaknesses to you again, but leave you to find them out for yourself.’

‘Then you will be safe, for I shall never look for them.’

‘There are others, however, who will point them out to you.’

‘I shall not believe them.’

‘Then you will be wrong,’ he answered, vehemently. ‘You cannot imagine how very weak I have been, Miss Dart.’ Again he took to pacing up and down the room, then

suddenly stopped, and, looking steadfastly in her face, inquired—

‘What is your opinion of a gambler?’

‘Gambling is a matter of which I have no knowledge,’ she answered, quietly.

‘It is hardly likely that that circumstance should prevent your condemnation of it,’ he put in, bitterly. ‘The most violent anti-tobaccoite is the man who has never smoked ; as the severest critic is the gentleman most ignorant of letters.’

‘Perhaps I am allowing you to give me credit for charity where it is not deserved,’ she replied, frankly. ‘I have “no information,” as “Bradshaw” says, of the motives that lead to the practice of which you speak ; but my impression is that there are three kinds of gamblers : some actuated by greed ; some who have a natural passion for excitement ; and others, again, who are gamblers, if I may so express it, by circumstance, who, making haste to become rich for a particular purpose, take the shortest, and find it the longest, way round. These last may be taught by experience, the

others, never. That, at least, is my poor opinion.'

'It is not the general view,' said Mr. Argand; 'but it is only like you to see the door of a *locus penitentiae* which has escaped the eyes of others—— Here comes your aunt. Well, my dear Mrs. Richter, have you read the paper ?'

'Don't speak of the paper, sir. I don't think I shall ever read a paper again; so unkind as it is, and so unfair——'

'I meant the article in the "Millennium,"' interrupted Mr. Argand, smiling—'your niece's article.'

'Oh, yes; I have read that, indeed, from first to last. It is simply beautiful! My dear Lizzie, how could such wonderful ideas ever get into your head? And how true it all is, especially about those adulterating shops, for as for cayenne pepper, there is not such a thing to be got, I do believe, within a mile of us. What can it be that makes people so wicked, Mr. Argand ?'

'Perhaps it's the new red-brick houses

which offer too great a temptation to the Italian warehousemen,' he answered, slily.

' You think it's *that*, do you ? Well, I am glad there is some excuse for them. I am sure, dear, this article will do ever so much good. It's almost like a sermon, is it not, Mr. Argand ? '

As it was evident that Mrs. Richter intended by this parallel to convey a compliment to his contributor of a high kind, the editor replied 'Yes, indeed,' though without effusion.

' I am quite sure your uncle, dear, would have approved of it immensely,' continued Aunt Jane: 'there is much true religious feeling in it, though without dogmatism.'

Mr. Argand smiled, and rose to take his leave: matters which had looked at first a little awkward had evidently turned out in the most satisfactory manner. From the moment that Mrs. Richter understood that her niece had written 'The Public Good,' her mind had become open to conviction, and it would now have been difficult to find a

more thick-and-thin admirer of its merits —a state of things which is not unexampled (though relationship, indeed, has nothing to do with it) in the very highest regions of Art and Literature. Lizzie, too, was well pleased to find the effects of the shock which she had unwittingly given Aunt Jane had passed off so quietly. But no sooner does one source of anxiety vanish in the human breast, than another succeeds it ; her mind was now full of trouble upon Mr. Argand's account ; it seemed to her that he had been on the point of telling her of some catastrophe which had happened to his own affairs. ‘What is your opinion of a gambler ?’ he had asked her, with a bitter self-reproach in his tone that had showed its personal application. She would never have suspected him of such a weakness, or believed in its existence, save for the testimony of his own lips ; but what surprised her, more even than the fact, was his voluntary confession of it. Not only had he never spoken to her of his private affairs before, but on this very occasion had seemed to express

some apprehension of his sister's having done so. Why, then, had he himself done the very thing to which he objected in another?

Here came the postman's knock, which always awakened anxiety in Lizzie's bosom for news from Burrow Hall, where Mrs. Melburn, it was only too certain, was now drawing near her end.

He only brought a letter for her, however, from Mr. Argand himself—a mere official note from the 'Millennium' office, inclosing a cheque for fifty pounds.

For a moment she had a mind to send it back—an impulse which, on reflection, she repented of with a hot blush ; and, indeed, it would have been an impertinence that Mr. Argand would not easily have forgiven.

The 'Millennium,' it was certain, was prosperous enough ; and whatever was amiss with the fortunes of its proprietor lay altogether outside of it.

## CHAPTER XXXVI.

## ‘OPINIONS IN STORIES.’

No article in a review, however striking, is a nine-days’ wonder ; and ‘The Public Good’ would, without doubt, have gone the way of all similar contributions in a week, at farthest, but for a strange rumour that began to follow wherever its reputation penetrated, like an echo. It was said that it was written by a woman. Considering the nature of the article in question, this circumstance, if true, was certainly—as the world agreed—remarkable. How the report originated was doubtful ; perhaps the opinion that Mr. Herbert, the great critic, had expressed respecting the first paper, by the same author, was, by mistake, transferred to the second ; or, perhaps, the critic himself professed to find in the second

paper the corroboration of his previous view. But, within a very few days of the appearance of the number of the ‘Millennium’ in question, it was announced in a society journal that Mr. John Javelin was a lady ; whereupon arose a considerable controversy. Some asserted—on the most irreproachable, though necessarily circumstantial, evidence—the writer to be a man ; others insisted that this or that particular literary touch could only have been given by a woman ; and some, indignant with a problem that they could not solve, and expressing themselves in what they confidently believed to be epigram, affirmed that whether man or woman, one thing at least was certain—the writer was neither gentleman nor lady.

Mr. Argand declared that a misery of which he had never dreamed was added to his unhappy lot as an editor. Letters arrived by every post, from the ‘dear Duchess’ who dabbles in literature up to the most established names in poetry and fiction, all beseeching him, if the name of his contributor was to

be a mystery, at least to tell them, in the strictest confidence, 'yes' or 'no' as to the sex. They even sent him a stamped envelope for a reply. 'Thanks to you, my dear Miss Dart,' he said, 'I have actually found out a new way of making enemies. As to revealing the matter to any one of these applicants, it would, indeed, have been to make it public at once.' 'You know I can keep a secret, my dear Mr. Argand,' wrote one impassioned lady—a somewhat compromising assurance, to which he prudently rejoined, 'I hope I can keep one, too.' The feelings of Miss Dart, who was all for secrecy, had to be consulted; and, moreover, his own advantage obviously lay in the same direction. The edition of the 'Millennium' in which 'The Public Good' appeared was devoured within three days; and another and another were called for. The article was quoted in 'the House,' with cheers, and—even better—with hisses. It was said that a famous writer in the 'Quarterly,' forgetful of etiquette and the politeness due to a rival, had sworn to demolish it in the

April number. It was the topic of conversation at every table where literature had any attraction at all. At that of Mr. Argand, a certain reticence upon the subject was naturally observed ; but it was often alluded to. To have her opinion asked upon her own production was, at first, a little embarrassing to Lizzie ; but she soon got used to it, and it tickled her sense of humour. No one imagined it to be within the limits of possibility that a young lady of her appearance and demeanour could have taken Society by the throat in so vigorous a manner.

Lizzie could talk charmingly and brightly enough, but it was her *rôle* to be a listener—to observe, and not to comment. Nothing, however, escaped her notice. What delighted her most was when some man of intelligence would amuse himself by ‘drawing her out’ into some region of thought far, as he imagined, beyond her depth ; or endeavoured to dazzle her with his intellectual coruscations. He gave her, indeed, as he flattered himself, much more than he received ; but he little

knew it was only in the form of ‘material.’ While appearing to be out of her depth, she was, in reality, but treading water or plumbing his own shallows. Modest as was her opinion of herself, it was difficult not to feel a certain consciousness of superiority born of involuntary comparison. The person of whom she learned most was, however, undoubtedly Mr. Argand ; whose mind was, to some extent, the complement of her own, and whose unlikeness fitted hers to a nicety. Not a word did he speak to her, since his visit on the occasion that has been described, respecting his own affairs ; but on other matters she had learned to talk with him with entire unreserve. He paid her the compliment, seldom vouchsafed by man to woman, to converse on speculative and spiritual subjects—‘Fate, Free-will, Fore-knowledge absolute.’ Complete friendship cannot exist between men without the exchange of this sort of confidence : it is not necessary that there should be an agreement, but there must be some confession of faith, or of the absence of faith.

Between women, such speculations are scarcely ever entertained ; and between men and women, as has been said, but rarely : when they are so, however, they form a very strong bond of sympathy. Never before had Elizabeth Dart met with a fellow-creature to whom it had been possible to confide those thoughts on Being and *not* Being—those weak solutions of ‘the riddle of the painful Earth’ which intrude dimly, once and again, on most minds, but which with others are far more urgent and importunate. It is seldom, indeed, anything of a practical nature comes of it ; but in this case something did come. Miss Dart conceived the idea of recording her spiritual and philosophical views of mankind after an entirely novel fashion. It was neither essay nor allegory, and still less was it one of those exhaustive treatises which leave the opinion of nineteen twentieths of the human race out of the question as valueless, just as the clergyman excused himself for neglecting his cure of souls upon the ground that they were not worth saving. In this remarkable

production, the creed of ordinary folk for the first time found expression. She called it 'Opinions in Stories'—a somewhat fanciful title, which, after some discussion with her editor, was, however, adopted.

The scheme of it was simple enough: an ordinary dwelling-house was, as it were, the stage on which this drama of speculation was enacted. There was first the dining-room, in which that sort of desultory talk took place between the men over the walnuts and the wine which sometimes occurs when the topic of the Future is introduced. There was the smoking-room, where the tongue, even on the most sacred subjects, grows more free and audacious; and there was the drawing-room, where men and women together—the same topic being retained—discoursed, as it were, on tip-toe, and not without reference to the clergyman of the parish. It was well for Miss Dart that she had taken her editor into her confidence, since, without his assistance in the matter, her representation of affairs would, notwithstanding her great powers of intuition,

have been necessarily incomplete : even as it was, they amazed him. A hint dropped here and there into her ear had given her the key to systems of thought which she had reproduced in their entirety, just as the professor of natural history evolved his whole animal from a thigh-bone ; nor was humour wanting to give naturalness to discussion, and remove it from the atmosphere of mere theology. At Mr. Argand’s suggestion, she greatly enlarged her original plan. The servants’ hall, and even the kitchen, were included in it, with John Thomas’s view ‘of another place,’ and Mary Jane’s idea of ‘bettering herself’ in a future sphere. But what, above all things, enhanced the attraction of this really unique production, was the pathos and beauty of that part of it entitled ‘The Sick-Chamber,’ where, by the pillow of the dear and dying, the about-to-be-left-desolate finds himself face to face with a question that has, hitherto, only presented itself to him as a subject for cynical or humorous speculation.

‘I know nothing like this in the language,’

was Mr. Argand's observation, when she read to him, in the back drawing-room in Harewood Square—which was always the scene of collaboration—that portion of her MS. She laughed at his enthusiasm, though it brought a flush of pleasure to her cheek. 'You may laugh, my dear Miss Dart,' he answered, gravely; 'but, the fact is, it is too good for the "Millennium,"' an observation which—as she afterwards ventured to tell him—seemed to throw his first eulogium, high as it was, completely into the shade. What he meant was that he had scruples about putting into his own columns that which he honestly believed would, if published separately, achieve for her a reputation. Miss Dart knew how to appreciate such generosity without taking advantage of it. She had, indeed, designed her contribution especially for Mr. Argand's review, with a mischievous intent (for which perhaps she would have been ashamed had not the Great Wizard of the North, in somewhat similar circumstances, set her the example) of still further mystifying its readers as to her

own identity. For ‘Opinions in Stories’ looked as little likely to have come from a woman’s hand as a contribution well could do ; while Mr. Argand’s touches, or rather his suggestions —for every line of it was her own—seemed to put the matter beyond all question.

It was impossible that editor and contributor should thus lay their heads together without being brought into close contact, and seeing much more of one another than heretofore. Yet their personal relations remained unchanged. Mr. Argand’s admiration for the genius of his protégée, as it developed before his eyes, was without disguise. His praises, which, though generous, had hitherto been expressed with judiciousness and caution, now knew no stint. He was no longer the master ; indeed, that he had never been, for he had always recognised attainments in her that were beyond his teaching ; he was no longer the Mentor to her Telemachus ; he was scarcely even the commentator of her work, but confined himself to such literary services as are hinted at in footnotes by the syllable ‘*sugg.*’ in italics.

But with all his appreciation and approval of her, and his obvious interest in her productions, there was no increase of warmth in his manner; on the contrary, despite his kindness, which was unceasing, and which displayed itself in a hundred ways, his tone was at times so cold—as it seemed to her, so studiously cold—that she almost feared she had offended him.

Her relations with Miss Argand had, on the other hand, improved, or at least that lady had become, of late, more gracious to her, and on one occasion Lizzie had ventured to ask her whether Mr. Argand was out of health.

‘Why do you ask?’ was the quick rejoinder, accompanied by a glance which seemed to search her very soul.

‘Only that I have fancied that he has seemed depressed—and overworked.’

‘Such a clever young woman as you should know that work never hurt anybody,’ returned Miss Argand, drily. Then, perceiving that her speech had given pain, she added, more gently, ‘My brother is a little worried

just now ; you must not take any notice of it.'

As Miss Dart looked up in the elder lady's face, she saw the tears in her eyes ; and instantly her own were filled with sympathetic dew.

' I am very, very sorry,' she murmured, timidly.

' I am sure you are—— There, there—— don't let's talk about it.'

All the arts of diplomacy directed towards an *entente cordiale* fade into insignificance beside one involuntary touch of nature ; and from that moment the two women understood one another. Though Lizzie's fears were thus corroborated, as respected the state of Mr. Argand's affairs, it was a comfort to her to be assured that there was no other reason for his depression. To a true woman's mind, 'money troubles' have never the importance that they assume with men. ' What matters, if you have but health and strength, my son ?' says the mother, consolingly. ' What matters, so long as we are still together, my darling ?' smiles the loving wife.

## CHAPTER XXXVII.

## A CHANCE MEETING.

ONE morning Miss Dart received a note from Mr. Argand written at the office of his review. It was his wont to keep his business and his social affairs as distinct and separate as his correspondents would permit him to do. In Harewood Square, unless they were in the back drawing-room together, which he playfully termed the 'shop,' he never spoke to Lizzie of his literary plans, while from his place of business he never wrote except on subjects connected with publication. It was his theory that a man should leave all thoughts of his daily work along with its toils in his office, and never permit them to intrude upon his leisure or pleasure.

' You will, no doubt, expect from the address upon my notepaper,' he began, ' that I

have got something to say to you as respects your forthcoming article ; even that would have a very considerable flavour of self about it, but as it happens my pen is dipped in self—*pur sang*, the very blackest fluid. A manuscript has been received here concerning which I am in want of another opinion, and there is no one to whom I look with greater confidence for it than yourself. It is a novel —of which class of literature I see a great deal more than enough. It is in type writing. I do not say that I should not otherwise have looked at it, but the circumstance, no doubt, attracted me to it. I took it up after luncheon over a cigar, and I only just lay it down, half-read, at six p.m. This fact, of course, is worth many columns of criticism, and under ordinary circumstances I should not mistrust the impression it implies ; but I have not been quite myself of late. The doctor tells me my “nervous centres are disorganised,” which is, I suppose, a euphemism for the liver being out of order ; at all events, when one is out of sorts I have noticed that both one’s approval and

disapproval upon literary matters are apt to be exaggerated. To confess the honest truth, I cannot trust myself to say what I think just now of this novel : perhaps to-morrow I may take, like the French gentleman, with his “superbe—magnifique—pretty vell,” a much less rapturous view. I am taking the thing home with me, to finish it to-night I trust—and it will be left with you in the morning. Read it carefully, don’t hurry over it as I have done, and then let me know your opinion. The author—for I am sure it is a man—gives only his initials and an address at a post-office ; but the communication which accompanies his contribution is characteristic enough :—

““ Dear Sir,—I forward you a novel entitled ‘The Usher.’ I offer you the use of it, that is, its serial right in the ‘Millennium,’ for 200*l.* It is worth that at least to you, or it will be worth nothing ; in the latter case be so good as to return it to me, registered, for which purpose I enclose the necessary stamps. Address M. M., Post-office, Euston-street.”

“ Short and sweet, is it not ? though

there is not much light with the sweetness. Who can it be ? It is no writer one knows, I'm certain, but quite a new hand. For one second it struck me that it might be your young friend, Matthew Meyrick ; but there is nothing but the similarity of the initial to suggest such a thing. The real Simon Pure, whoever he is, knows the world well, and has had, I should say, no very pleasant experience of it. However, I am forgetting that you have not been introduced to M. M., or rather to his MS., which will arrive by hand (for safety's sake) very soon after this note. I am very impatient for your opinion.' Then came a postscript which made Lizzie smile. 'I think that no time should be lost in sending "The Usher" to the printers. If the first chapters could appear side by side with your own admirable article, we are pretty certain to have a double-barrelled success in the next number. What do you say ?'

It was clear to Miss Dart that whatever she said would, under these circumstances, have but little effect upon the fate of the MS.

in question ; but, nevertheless, she gave her best attention to it. To speak of 'The Usher' here would be superfluous ; the time is past for criticising a work about which the public has long made up its mind. The only interest that the matter could now possess would be in the impressions that a book so well known to the world conveyed to the mind of a reader on its first appearance. Let it suffice to say that Lizzie, though not insensible to its merits, was unable to accord the measureless approbation that was expected of her. She acknowledged that the novel was original ; she was even tempted, in some places, to think very highly of it ; but on the whole, with Mr. Argand's eulogy ringing in her ears, it disappointed her. The story of the despised drudge who develops such talents as a painter, and in his immense prosperity awards good and evil, like a small providence, to the companions of his youth, reminded her of Monte Cristo, and suffered by the comparison. The characters were lifelike enough, she confessed, but too photographic ; they lacked shade.

The satire seemed not only bitter but personal ; some of the portraits, indeed, only fell short of caricature because there was so little good nature about them : they resembled lampoons. These opinions, with some pruning, she set down in writing, and sent to Mr. Argand. 'A thousand thanks,' he wrote back by return of post ; 'I could not have thought that any criticism could have given me so much pleasure. From the manner in which you have always received my advice, I had begun to think you too "nobly planned"—a contributor too pure and good for an editor's daily, or even quarterly, food. Now, I perceive that you are human, after all. Your grudging appreciation of "The Usher" betrays the sex of Mr. John Javelin. It is also her excuse. My dear Miss Dart, you are jealous.'

It was plain that she had made him angry ; nor can it be denied that he had some reason to be so. The manager of an operatic company who has discovered a novice with a voice is naturally outraged when his judgment on so delicate a matter is impugned ; and when the

objection comes from a lady who is herself a professional singer, the explanation of it is only too obvious. The matter, in fact, which only moved Lizzie to mirth, disturbed Mr. Argand for four-and-twenty hours—until he saw her. Then they had it out together in a manner entirely satisfactory to him—that is to say, he got everything his own way.

‘You allow,’ he said, ‘that there is a certain rough vigour about the story?’

She nodded.

‘And you admit that it is original?’

She hesitated, but at last consented with another nod.

‘And, at all events, there is no doubt, if one is to admit fiction into the “Millennium” at all, that here is an opportunity?’

‘Of that, of course, Mr. Argand, you are the best judge.’

‘Very good!’ he exclaimed, complacently. ‘I was convinced that, upon reflection, you would come over to my opinion.’

The incident is narrated, not only as affording an excellent example of how to

conduct an argument and bring it to a satisfactory conclusion, but because it will afterwards be reverted to.

In the meantime, however, other events took place which put literary affairs out of Lizzie's head. The long-expected letter announcing Mrs. Melburn's death arrived from Casterton. Mrs. Meyrick, Matthew wrote, had been summoned to Burrow Hall, and would presently bring Mary back to the Look-out, probably to stay there an indefinite time. There had been troubles at the Hall of other kinds—some dispute between the Squire and Jefferson, who had sold out of the Army, and had been living at home—about money matters. It was rumoured that Mr. Melburn's affairs were seriously involved. The idea of Mary's coming to Casterton 'for good' was, of course, inexpressibly welcome to the writer ; but there was an air of melancholy throughout his letter quite apart from the tidings it conveyed, for which, indeed, every one had been long prepared, and that seemed to speak of failing health. 'If you can tear yourself

away from your beloved London, when the summer weather comes on, it would be a charity to come and see us,' he wrote. 'We are, as usual here, in a state of stagnation, only dear old Roger is greatly excited by the circumstance of Battle Hill being offered for sale. What horrifies him even more than the fact itself, is that it is recommended in the advertisement as an excellent site for building purposes. He already sees, in imagination, a row of villa residences, spick and span, erected over the bones of the Danish host, and their ill-gotten treasures thereby put further out of reach than ever ; it is with difficulty that the dear old gentleman can be restrained from selling his all, and placing the proceeds in this very unproductive investment. The whole thing is offered at what certainly seems a cheap price, but, unfortunately, not for a song, or you would have to congratulate me upon being a landed proprietor. Nothing would give me greater pleasure—or let us say few things'—(for Lizzie there was a pathos in this reservation) 'than to give old Roger Leyden the title-

deeds of Battle Hill upon his next birthday : on the other hand, it is to be feared that he would at once set to work with pick and spade, and ruin himself in a fortnight. How nice it would be, if somebody of taste, who admired our little town, and who is making quite a fortune, as we hear, by literature, in London, would come down and buy the Hill. This could be done for two or three hundred pounds ; a charming little cottage could be built upon it for as much again, to which she would bring her excellent aunt, and, with the help of some appreciative neighbours, they would live happy ever afterwards. Alas ! my dear Miss Dart, this is but a dream, I know. Such good fortune is not to be expected out of fairyland. Let us hope that the sleep with which our little life is rounded may have such dreams.'

This letter not only filled its recipient with sad thoughts on Mary Melburn's account, but on that of the writer. She was moved to go down to Casterton, and comfort—so far as it lay in her power to do so—that unhappy pair.

It also increased in her the yearning she had long entertained to revisit that dear old town by the sea, where she had first looked real happiness in the face. Perhaps in the summer, if matters went as well with her as they promised to do, this would be possible. How delightful it would be, to exchange the heat and dust and noise of the town for the fresh breezes of quiet Casterton! How charmed Aunt Jane would be with it! Dreadful as Mary's loss must for the present appear to her, she would have a far happier life with Mrs. Meyrick than she had ever had at home, if only Matthew was spared to them—a momentous 'if,' indeed : for as to any complete hope of recovery, that seemed further off from the poor lad than ever.

Lizzie sat down and wrote a long letter of condolence to Mary, full of genuine love and sympathy, but not with the complete naturalness she would have wished. She respected Mrs. Melburn's character, and intensely pitied her ; but her heart had never been attracted to her as it had been towards her daughter.

She had been one of those women who live and suffer for their own belongings only ; the tendrils of whose sympathy cling to what is immediately near them, but do not extend beyond it. Nevertheless, Miss Dart was heavy at heart because of her. She felt very disinclined for society, and much regretted that Mrs. Richter and herself had promised to accompany Mr. Argand and his sister to the opera that evening ; but a box had been placed at his disposal, a circumstance which did not often occur, and she knew that her absence would greatly disappoint him. How often it happens that we attend scenes of gaiety from reasons altogether disconnected with their attractions, though our presence is always taken as a sign of lightheartedness ! There is a certain eloquent divine of the English Church against whom it is cast up to this day that he used to play cards at college on a Sunday. The statement is true ; but, so far as it implies an accusation, absurdly false. Grave, even in his adolescence, he disliked all games, and abstained from them ; but one of his friends

fell ill, and, to ease his pain, would often play at cribbage. On week-days he had plenty of companions to play with him ; but on Sundays he found it difficult to find one ; whereupon the embryo divine volunteered to be his play-mate : an act of self-sacrifice that has cost him more than he was aware of at the time, or that, being a man of sense, he had thought possible ; but which, nevertheless, he has never regretted. If the eye of observation scans the rows of a crowded theatre, it is not difficult to discover those who have come to be amused from that large minority who have no such object in view, but who find themselves there from force of circumstances : there are as grave faces to be found in boxes as in pews ; unmoved by what is going on upon the mimic stage, they are wrapt in some drama of real life which is being enacted within them, and only when 'waked with silence,' as the curtain falls, do they become conscious of their surroundings.

It was in this uncongenial frame of mind that Lizzie found herself seated by Mr. Argand that evening at the opera. He addressed her

more than once, but it was with difficulty that she compelled her attention to what he said. Her eyes rarely sought the stage, but wandered over the house, the comparative monotony of which allowed her thoughts more freedom ; the loud notes of the singers reached her ears, but penetrated no further ; the doorways of her brain were closed to them. Her thoughts were now in the chamber of death at Burrow Hall, now upon the windy downs it looked upon, and now on the summit of Battle Hill, with the far-stretching marsh and endless sea beneath her. Amid these scenes only a small portion of her life had been spent, yet its chief events had lain there. Her greatest happiness had come to her there, and also her greatest misery ; the shock of it, she knew, had changed the whole course of her existence ; and the remembrance of it still filled her with pain and shame. She was now on the jetty of Casterton, alone ; the wild waste of water weltered cold and grey around her ; a few seagulls were circling in the evening sky, and uttering at intervals a wild and discordant

cry ; when suddenly the scene vanished with the celerity of a dissolving view, and she became aware of two black spots—an opera-glass was being levelled at her from the opposite box. She gazed mechanically at its inmates. One was a thin, cadaverous man, still young, but with all the premature signs of age ; so terrible was the alteration his mode of life had wrought in him since she had seen him last, that she would, perhaps, have failed to recognise him as Mr. Winthrop, but for his companion, who held the glass, and was pointing it at her still with insolent persistence : it was impossible to mistake Jefferson Melburn for any other man.

## CHAPTER XXXVIII.

## AFTER-DINNER CRITICS.

THE baleful vision which Miss Dart had seen in the opera-house would not, under ordinary circumstances, perhaps, have much disturbed her. It was not as if she still nourished a single sentimental regret in connection with Jefferson Melburn. He had power only to disgust, not to wound her. But, as it happened, the meeting had taken place when she was nervous and unhinged ; and, though she contrived to conceal its occurrence from her friends, it seriously affected her. The knowledge that this man was in London, and might possibly be again brought face to face with her, preyed upon her spirits. She had been working very hard of late, and was conscious of a need for rest she had never felt

before. On the other hand, she could not afford two outings in the year, and it was imprudent thus to anticipate the summer. Nature in spring-time calls those in city pent into the woods and fields ; but it is only the rich who can afford to obey her summons at that period. When a shipwrecked company have only a small stock of provision for a long voyage, they must eke it out as best they can ; if they take their fill of food at first, they will have none left to eat in days when they will want it more. And thus it is with a great majority of us in respect to holidays. We yearn to leave this living tomb of town when the leaves come on the trees ; but a time will come, we know, when it will be still more intolerable to dwell in it, and we postpone our holiday till then. All we can do, in the meantime, when we find ourselves run down or out of sorts, is to try a tonic. About this time Miss Dart had one presented to her, in the form of a piece of good news—an ounce of which, as is well known, is worth a ton of bark. The April number of the ' Millennium '

came out, and ‘Opinions in Stories’ was received with universal approbation. Had it stood alone, the article could hardly have failed to attract public attention ; but as the third of a trilogy, of which two had already made their mark, it created an immense sensation. Those who had asserted that its predecessors had been written by a woman were, however, contrary to Mr. Argand’s expectations, by no means silenced. Masculine and vigorous as the style was. by all admitted to be, there were some who contended that the ‘Death Chamber’ could only have been written by a female hand. The review, within a few weeks, reached a pinnacle of success it had never attained before.

At a dinner-party at Harewood Square, at which Miss Dart was present, this circumstance became the subject of conversation.

‘Is it a State secret, or not, Argand,’ inquired one of the guests, ‘that the “Millennium” has doubled its circulation this month?’

‘It is certainly not a State secret,’ said Mr.

Argand, smiling : ‘on the contrary, I am happy to say it is a simple fact.’

‘But that is not Mr. John Javelin’s doing,’ observed another guest, in a dry tone. The speaker was a Mr. Davies, who, not content with being the terror of authors in the ‘Weekly Weasel,’ had actually republished his own criticisms in book form. ‘I have no doubt his essays, or whatever he terms them, are popular with a certain class ; but nobody’s essays ever doubled the circulation of anything. It must be the story that has done it.’

‘That is what you have said in the “Weasel” already,’ said Mr. Argand, sharply, for he was annoyed that such a discussion should have been raised before Miss Dart. He had confidence in her good sense, and knew that she took a tolerably philosophic view of criticism ; but then the critics had hitherto been favourable to her. They were so now, only some of them had turned away from her to worship the rising sun—the anonymous author of ‘The Usher.’

There was no doubt that, great as had

been the sensation made by Miss Dart's productions, it had been equalled, if not surpassed, by that of her new rival.

'I remark that while rapping Davies's knuckles,' observed another guest, a Mr. Elliott, a critic renowned for his severity, 'our host has omitted to answer his question. Is it possible, I wonder, that both novelist and essayist are here present amongst us, and that he does not, for his life, dare give an opinion as to which has raised the circulation, for fear of offending the other ?'

'And also for fear of having to increase his scale of remuneration,' added Mr. Davies, acidly.

Amid the laughter which followed this sally, the ladies rose.

'I wonder whether Argand's rival contributors are with us now or not ?' observed the incorrigible Elliott; 'to judge by the look of relief upon his face, one would imagine them both to have gone upstairs.'

'No woman ever wrote "The Usher,"' I'll take my oath,' ejaculated Davies, bluntly.

‘Will you venture a five-pound note upon that?’ observed a quiet voice. It came from Mr. Herbert, who was a man not given to much speaking, but who, when he did speak, was listened to in literary circles with respectful attention. He was not, like Messrs. Davies and Elliott, a tomahawk critic; he thought less of being smart himself (and of making his author smart) than of doing justice to a book; but his tongue was like a whip, and, at the smack of it, curs hid themselves.

The positive one was silenced. ‘Davies reminds me, Mr. Herbert,’ observed Elliott, in his silkiest manner, ‘of the prudent schoolboy—“Will you take your oath?” “Yes.” “Will you take your dying oath?” “Yes.” “Will you bet sixpence?” “No.” Perjury has no fears for him; but he draws the line at speculative investment.’

‘Why is it you think “The Usher” may have been written by a woman, Herbert?’ inquired Mr. Argand, earnestly. ‘It is a matter on which I really seek for information, for the MS. came to me anonymously; nor

have I the least clue as to the writer.' This statement made not a little sensation, for Mr. Argand's word was not to be doubted.

' You are deuced peculiar as well as fortunate in your secrets, Argand,' observed Davies, grudgingly ; ' notwithstanding that all our writers in the "Weasel" are anonymous, there is very little difficulty, I fancy, in finding out the real Simon pure.'

' Does any one ever want to find them out ? ' inquired Mr. Elliott.

' I think I recognise a woman's hand in "The Usher," ' observed Mr. Herbert, taking no more notice of this passage of arms than a great St. Bernard of the quarrel between two pugs, ' for two reasons : it is at once too tender and too bitter for a man's work.'

' And its merits ; what do you think of them ? '

' I scarcely like to say. There is not enough of it at present on which to form an opinion.'

' I have read the whole of it,' said Mr.

Argand ; 'and in my judgment, it keeps up its present interest to the end.'

'Then there is no novel published within the last quarter of a century with which it need fear comparison,' said Mr. Herbert, confidently.

'That's not saying much for it,' muttered Mr. Elliott, spitefully.

'Elliott looks on the great works of literature,' said Mr. Herbert, 'as other folks look on the horizon. Whenever he approaches them, so far as their greatness is concerned, they vanish. He is like the people who praise the good old times ; they decline to fix on any old time in particular, but retire further and further back, till they and their praise together are lost in the mist of ages. His counterpart in the next century will be crushing the contemporary novelist by comparing him with the giant author of "The Usher."'

Mr. Herbert's opinion of the novel was very welcome to Mr. Argand, for he had great confidence in his judgment. On the other hand, strangely enough, he found him-

self grudging the unknown author not only his praise, but his success. As the editor, and still more as the proprietor, of the 'Millennium,' this feeling was as unnatural as it was unaccountable ; but he could not help feeling mortified, not, as he told himself over and over again, upon Miss Dart's account, but on his own, that her contribution had taken the second place in the public estimation. Like a violet by a mossy stone, her genius had been hidden from the eye till he had discovered it ; though he had not planted, he had watered and nourished it ; and he had taken a natural pride in the admiration excited by its beauty. With her anonymous rival it was impossible he could feel this sympathy. Whether 'The Usher' was superior to 'Opinions in Stories' or to Miss Dart's other essays was not, indeed, the question. No comparison could possibly be made between them. The fact of the former being a fiction —other things being equal, or even nearly equal—was quite sufficient to account for its greater popularity. Still, it troubled him.

He had not been serious when he had written to Miss Dart that her want of appreciation of the new novelist had been caused by jealousy ; he was jealous for her, but he knew that she herself was superior to any such sentiment, and that the news of the success of 'The Usher' would give her genuine pleasure. Yet hitherto he had forbore to speak of it. This evening, however, on finding himself next to her in the drawing-room, he was induced to do so. The topic arose out of the conversation that had taken place below-stairs.

'What is the matter, Mr. Argand ?' inquired Miss Dart, softly, as he took his seat beside her. 'It's no use to answer "Nothing;" something, I am sure, has ruffled you.'

'Nothing can escape your eye, I know ; well, something *has* ruffled me. It is very foolish, of course, to allow oneself to be put out by such trifles ; but to have to listen to the chatter of such men as Davies and Elliott as their host—that is, without the right of rejoinder—is rather a trial.'

‘And what have they been talking about?’

‘You.’

‘Good gracious! What could such eminent individuals have to say about me?’

‘Well, of course they did not know that it was you they were discussing. Elliott was, as usual, eloquent on the decline and fall of literature, of which, forsooth, he had the impudence to quote “Opinions in Stories” as an example. He declared there have been no essays worth reading since the “Spectator.” “What!” I said, wishing to give the man a loophole of escape from his own attic, “not even in the ‘Indicator’?” He answered “No,” in a manner that convinced me he had never read it, and then went rambling on against all modern writers in that spitefully apish manner which is my peculiar aversion. It would have done you good to hear Herbert answer him. He reminded us how the praise of the past at the expense of the present has been a favourite practice in all ages; how Goldsmith suffered from it in his time, as no doubt Shakspeare did in his, and traced its

origin to the same cause as that which produces the worship of high birth in the vulgar. They pretend to admire it above intellectual gifts, in order to belittle those of their own class who happen to possess them.'

'He meant, then, by analogy to imply that the person who denies genius to the writer of his own time is generally himself a failure,' observed Lizzie. 'Was that not rather hard upon Mr. Elliott ?'

'Not a bit of it ; besides, his skin is like that of a rhinoceros. I only wish Davies had given Herbert the same chance of putting in his left. But Davies, though impudent, is not courageous. The idea of his having said in his mangy paper that "The Public Good" may have been a striking essay, but it was not literature !'

'But why should he not say so if he thinks so ?' inquired Miss Dart, smiling.

'But he does not think so, any more than Elliott thinks that this is the brazen age of fiction ; it is only he who is brazen, and he knows it.'

‘But these poor creatures do nobody any harm,’ argued Lizzie.

‘True, but they mean harm ; they are the curs that bark at the heels of success, and they would unhorse the rider, if they could, for very spite.’

‘I wish I could be angry with them to oblige you, Mr Argand ; but I suppose they take some pleasure in barking, and as they cannot bite, what does it matter ?’

‘You are too good-natured, my dear Miss Dart. If you were not so, I should hesitate to tell you of the success that “The Usher” is attaining.’

‘Why, you don’t suppose because that proves your good judgment with respect to the attraction of the work, and my own appreciation of it to be too cold, that I should be otherwise than pleased, surely ? I am delighted to hear that it is so much liked.’

‘I am sure you are. Envy and jealousy were left out of your disposition from the first, just as there are some oranges without pips.’

‘So far as “The Usher” is concerned—

though please to observe I take no credit for that—I certainly feel neither. Has it really had a good effect upon the circulation of the “Millennium”?

‘A very great effect. It is not only the public who are charmed with it, but what is of much greater consequence to the author—the publishers.’

‘Isn’t that the same thing?’

‘Not at all. The public is sometimes sweet upon an author when the publishers cannot be persuaded to be so, while the contrary happens still more often. I have known writers continue to sell their MSS. whose books cannot be sold. There is a great deal more sentiment in “the trade” than is generally suspected. But “The Usher” has done well with both parties. Look at that!’

He put in her hand a letter from a great magnate of Paternoster-row.

‘Dear Argand,—Will you be so good as to forward the inclosed to your new author. In my opinion he will go far; and I trust to your good offices to bring us together. If you

think my proposition, which I leave open in more senses than one, is likely to fall short of his expectation, be so good as to let me know, and I will remodel it.'

With this note was another, addressed to M. M., in which, after certain stipulations as to the length of the story, a thousand pounds was offered for the copyright of 'The Usher.'

'That seems a large sum.' observed Miss Dart. 'I suppose you will advise the gentleman to accept it.'

'I shall do nothing of the sort. If he does not choose to confide in me, I shall certainly not volunteer my advice.'

'I did not think you could be so unkind, Mr. Argand. You knew nothing of me, but my name, in my case.'

'That was very different,' he answered, softly. 'I draw the line at initials. One is not interested in the spiritual welfare of "M or N" in the Catechism.'

'And what do you think M. M. will do as respects this offer?'

'He will jump at it, of course, and thereby

prove himself to be not quite so clever a gentleman as he thinks himself. He ought to sell the book for a term of years. I only wish, my dear Miss Dart, that this Monarch of the Row would bid as highly for what is just as meritorious, though in another way. When you have written essays enough to make up a volume, we shall find out how far his appreciation extends in that direction.'

'Then I may hope that the "Millennium" is not quite tired of me yet?' said Miss Dart, gaily.

'It will always be glad to get you for its contributor, you may be very sure, whatever happens,' observed Mr. Argand, in tones grave even to sorrowfulness. She looked up quickly, with sympathising face, but he had already risen, and was addressing himself to another guest. 'What could he have meant,' she wondered, 'by that Whatever happens?' If he was thinking of separating himself from the review, it would be grief indeed to her; the assurance that he had given of her permanent connection with it in any case, would in

that contingency be but small comfort : for the review was what bound them together, and if that bond should snap, there would be no excuse for their meeting ; for those conversations, which gave such a charm to life ; for that companionship, which would, if withdrawn, be such an inexpressible loss to her.

## CHAPTER XXXIX.

## REVISITED.

‘SHOULD you like a little trip into the country, Aunt Jane?’ inquired Lizzie, as they sat at breakfast one morning, a few days after the dinner party at Harewood Square.

‘What a question, my dear? You might as well ask me if I should like a glimpse of heaven. The only drawback in both cases would be that I should have to come back again. Shall it be Richmond Park or Hampstead Heath?’

‘I propose that we shall run down to the sea.’

‘Very good, my dear: it will, however, be rather fatiguing. It has always struck me that those six hours at the seaside for three shillings——’

‘Six hours !’ interrupted Miss Dart, with a haughty wave of her hand. ‘That is the allowance of the excursionists : of people without cash in their pockets. I intend to go for a week, at least.’

‘But will not that be very expensive ? At this time of year, to be sure, lodgings are cheap.’

‘I mean to go to an hotel.’

‘An hotel ! Goodness gracious ! why, we shall be ruined. I quite think you ought to have a holiday, my dear ; and I need not say what intense pleasure it will give me to accompany you. You have been working like a horse, I know, for the last three months ; and you ought to be as comfortable and free from sordid cares as possible ; but if you will leave all the housekeeping and marketing to me——’

‘You will get as little of a holiday at the sea as you get in London,’ put in Lizzie, authoritatively. ‘What I am bent on is not only comfort, but luxury. I intend to be extravagant—lavish !’

‘Mercy me, the girl’s mad ! That hundred pounds of yours—though, I must say, it was very handsome of Mr. Argand to give it ; it’s what I call coining money—burns in your pocket. No, my dear. When your uncle and I were married we went to an hotel for ten days. One ought to have been happy, of course, being on one’s honeymoon ; but one wasn’t. Every bit I put into my mouth went, so to speak, against my stomach. It seemed like eating gold ; a cup of tea was ninepence. If they brought you a sandwich and a glass of water on a tray, they charged you for plate, glass, and linen. Nobody ought ever to put his head into an hotel that isn’t made of money.’

‘But if you are—why, then it does not matter,’ returned Lizzie, gravely. ‘Look at that—and that—and that,’ and with every ‘that’ the speaker produced from a pocket-book a new bank-note for a hundred pounds.

‘Heaven have mercy upon us !’ gasped Mrs. Richter.

‘Say, rather, for what we have received

let it make us thankful,' returned Lizzie, smiling.

'And do you mean to say, you have made all those yourself, you amazing creature ?'

'I made them, but I didn't forge them, as you think : they are all honestly come by, I do assure you. By the eleven o'clock express this morning we are going down to Casterton, where we shall put up at the Welcome. For the first time for many years, my dear Aunt Jane, you are about to enjoy yourself. If ever I catch you talking—nay, thinking—about what anything costs—mind this—I'll throw a five-pound note into the fire.'

Nothing in the way of wonderment out of a fairy story was ever seen like the expression of Aunt Jane's face. The whole situation, in her eyes, was nothing less than magical. It never even struck her to inquire where all that enormous wealth (as it seemed to her) in bank notes had come from. Her niece's masterful air and complete confidence in her own resources would of themselves have effected much ; but, backed as they were by

such material evidences of prosperity, they crushed curiosity itself. Like a child at a pantomime, dazed by the glare of the transformation scene, she did not seek to know how such splendours were produced, but was content to wonder and admire. She left the room to make her simple preparations for the trip, in a sort of splendid stupor, such as is said to be induced by haschish. As for Elizabeth Dart, she had never been so in love with life as at that moment. There is no happiness in the world equal to making happy those we love. To set some good soul, long buffeted by the waves of adversity, above their reach, is an action in the power of comparatively few of us ; and not one in ten of those few have the wish to do it. This enormous pleasure, however, had fallen to this young woman's lot. The years of self-sacrifice that her aunt had devoted to her without a murmur, the thousand acts of priceless love she had done for her, were all remembered ; and the thought that the time had come at last—not to repay her, for that

was impossible—but to show how sensible she was of them, filled her soul with joy. Never again, please God, should sordid care or apprehension for the future—a future not her own—vex that gentle heart ! The very winds of heaven should never visit that cheek, furrowed by widow's tears and worn with loneliness and poverty, too roughly. One thing only troubled her, and made her almost ashamed of her happiness—the thought of Mary Melburn, poor and motherless, whom she was about to visit ; but it was possible she might make the rough path of life smoother to her also, if the rays of that prosperity which had begun to dawn upon her should grow to the full light of noon. She was not ambitious, but she was very sanguine about her future ; and, indeed, not without reason. It was very unphilosophic, no doubt, to be thus elated by a wave or two of the wand of Good Fortune ; but then, Lizzie made no claim to philosophy—she was a very intelligent and practical young woman.

She had something even now in her mind of a very practical character, notwithstanding that it was so full of joy and love. It mingled with the pleasure with which she watched Aunt Jane's delight upon the journey and enhanced it. 'How green the trees are, how blue the sky is : just as they used to be in Devonshire !' said the simple creature.

'You ought to live in the country all your days,' said Lizzie.

Aunt Jane uttered a little sigh, and shook her head.

'We can't have everything we wish in this world, my darling ; let us be grateful for the blessings we do have. Did ever such a day as this come out of the heavens before ?'

'You don't know what comes out of the heavens,' said Lizzie, gently. 'How long is it since you have been ten miles from London ?'

'Ten years. How deliciously fresh the air is !'

‘It is nothing to what it will be by the sea. But it will be very quiet down at Casterton. You must not expect to be dining out and going to the opera, as you do in London, you dear old dissipated thing.’

‘The idea of my wanting to do anything of the kind !’ exclaimed Mrs. Richter, indignantly ; ‘why, for my part——’

Then she stopped, but not in time.

‘Do you suppose I don’t know, Aunt Jane, that you do such things for my sake, and for my sake only ?’

‘I didn’t mean that, my dear,’ said Aunt Jane, penitently. ‘I’m sure I am very glad to go with you anywhere ; only, if people did but know who you were, I should enjoy it so much better. I have sometimes thought to myself, when they have been talking about those wonderful writings of yours, now, if I could only be allowed to say, “It was Lizzie Dart who wrote those things, and I’m her aunt ;” that would be the happiest moment of my life.’

‘You *dear* !’ said Lizzie. She felt by

intuition that the light of fame is never so welcome as when we see it reflected in the eyes of those who love us.

‘I suppose some of your friends will be at the station?’ observed Aunt Jane, timidly, as they drew near to their destination.

‘Certainly not; they have not the least idea that we are coming.’

Mrs. Richter’s face wore a look of relief. ‘Then we shall have this evening all to ourselves, shall we?’

‘Well, I think, as the inn is rather close to them’ (it was about four doors from the Look-out), ‘we must just drop in to see them. But I promise you this, my dear, that if you don’t like them we will see as little of them as possible.’

‘I am sure I shall like them, because they love you,’ returned Aunt Jane, placidly. She was speaking the simple truth—a jewel that not all the gold of the Indies can purchase. What would many a rich man give, I wonder, if he could only hear a fellow-creature utter such words, and believe them? Not only to

have lovers for our own sake, but to win their goodwill for others because they love us, is a feat beyond the reach of wealth, or power, or fame.

‘How fortunate we were in having that charming carriage, Lizzie, all to ourselves!’ observed Aunt Jane, as they waited for their luggage on the platform. ‘And what a delightful guard; is it possible, I heard him say “Thank you,” Lizzie, as we got out?’

‘Very likely; they are certainly civil on this line,’ replied Lizzie, with gravity. ‘I am glad you enjoyed the journey.’

‘I did, indeed, except for the thought of what it must have cost you. The idea of bringing me first class!’

‘I shall have to order a fire to be lighted at the inn, to put that five-pound note in, Aunt Jane, if you say another word.’

‘Well, well, I won’t. But must we really take a fly—is there no omnibus?’

‘I have a good mind to wait here till a carriage-and-four can be procured,’ was the menacing rejoinder.

‘Why, the very porter touches his hat to us, Lizzie. I never experienced such civility —never! Oh, what air! Oh, what a view! I never saw such a singular-looking hill in all my life.’

‘That is Battle Hill, of which I have told you so much. See how it towers above the marsh! What a place it would be to build a house upon, would it not? Do you see a black speck moving along the top of it? —that is Mr. Leyden.’

‘My dear child, how can you possibly know that?’

‘Because I know his ways.’

‘One would think that you had lived with these good folks all your life,’ remarked Aunt Jane, with just the least touch of annoyance in her tone.

‘And so, indeed, it seems,’ answered Lizzie, simply; not forgetting, however, at the same time to lay an assuring hand upon her companion’s arm. ‘There are people with whom we may live under the same roof for years and never know; while there are others whose hearts are opened to us in a few hours.’

‘But you must have the key,’ observed Mrs. Richter, with unaccustomed shrewdness.

‘No doubt. I do not speak, of course, of those who wear their hearts upon their sleeves. There must be sympathy.’

‘But even in that, one is sometimes mistaken.’

‘True.’ It was only a monosyllable, but it was as conclusive as the most laboured discourse. Poor Mrs. Richter felt like one who, going through some great mansion with her host, opens, through inadvertence, some Blue Beard’s Chamber. She hastened to change the subject.

‘How numerous are the churches yonder, in that great plain! The folk about here ought to be very good.’

‘Still I should prefer not to live upon the marsh. In midsummer there is no shade to be found there save what is cast by Battle Hill. It always used to remind me of that line in the Bible, “The shadow of a great rock in a weary land.” When we build our house here, it shall look the other way—not towards

the marsh, but the town. Did you ever see such a quaint old place ? '

' Never, never : it is peace and rest itself,' murmured the little lady, in a rapture.

Her aunt's enthusiasm delighted Lizzie ; and, indeed, there are few things more pleasant than introducing those dear to us to scenes we love : moreover, seldom is it that, on re-visiting a spot, we can say, ' I am happier than the last time I saw it,' for even if we have no sense of loss, at all events we are older, and our spirits less buoyant than of yore. But in Lizzie's case the comparison of past and present was altogether in favour of the latter. Her new-born prosperity was as marvellous to her, and almost as inexplicable, as it was to her companion.

Their destination was, of course, the Welcome Inn, where it will be remembered Major Melburn had been on the point of having a 'difficulty' with Mr. Winthrop. Their apartments comprehended the very room where the discussion between the two worthies had taken place. Its old-fashioned look, which seemed

to promise moderate charges, pleased Mrs. Richter, while the view from the bedroom, which commanded the same prospect as that from the Look-out, charmed her beyond comparison.

‘Do you like this?’ inquired Lizzie, as the other sat enraptured at the window, drinking in the glorious breeze. ‘Do you think you shall be happy here?’

‘Yes, oh yes; except for the thought of having to go away again.’

‘I was afraid it would make you rather dissatisfied with the Marylebone Road,’ said Lizzie, gently.

‘Nay, my dear; that would be wrong, indeed. We should be content with what we have; but this change is delightful.’

‘Perhaps, if one lived here one would get tired of it.’

‘I can’t say that, my dear: it would seem like blasphemy. Never, never, never have I seen anything half as beautiful!’

Lizzie bent down with a smile of serene content, and kissed her aunt upon the forehead.

After luncheon they repaired to the Look-out. Aunt Jane had endeavoured to persuade her niece to see her friends at first alone ; but Lizzie was resolute that they should go together. She wished it to be understood how entirely they two were one, and also, by the reception which she knew she would meet with, that her aunt might be assured of the genuineness of the attachment of her friends at Caster-ton. Nor in this was she disappointed: even the little maid welcomed her with a cry of rapture.

‘Lor, Miss Dart ; how pleased Missus will be to see you ! ’

When her name was announced in the sitting-room, Mrs. Meyrick started from her chair, and held out both her arms in welcome. ‘ You dear, *dear girl !* ’ she exclaimed. ‘ This is Aunt Jane, of course,’ she added, shaking her heartily by the hand. ‘ What good fairy has brought you down to us ? And why did you not give us a word of warning, Lizzie ? Not that that signifies, of course ; for I know you will not mind sharing Mary’s room, and Mrs. Richter will, of course, have yours.’

‘We are staying at the inn, my dear Mrs. Meyrick, thank you ; but you will see quite enough of us, I promise you.’

‘Enough of you? There, don’t you talk to me like that, Lizzie. Life in London has already taught you to tell fibs. I shall send for your boxes instantly.’

Shy little Mrs. Richter quaked in her shoes lest her niece should succumb to the proposal. Modest as was her estimate of herself, she could have no doubt of her hostess’s goodwill towards her ; but half the pleasure of her holiday would have been taken away had she been expected to spend it in a strange house, and, as she expressed it, ‘on her best behaviour.’ But Miss Dart stuck to her guns, and was not to be dislodged from the position she had taken up, and for the choice of which she had her reasons.

‘And how is dear Mary?’

‘I think as well as can be expected ; it is, I am thankful to feel, a comfort to her to be here.’

‘I am sure of that. And Matthew?’

‘He is no better’—the tears came into the widow’s eyes. ‘I only hope you will think he is no worse. He does not complain; but he moves about less and less. I tell him it is bad for Mary—for he can scarcely ever be induced to be without her—and he does make what effort he can. ‘But——’ here Mrs. Meyrick broke off, or, rather, broke down; there was no need, indeed, for her to finish, for she was speaking to sympathetic ears. ‘I am sure the sight of you, Lizzie, will do him as much good as anything,’ she added, after a painful pause.

‘Is he in the Pavilion?’

‘Yes; he lives there, just as usual; only, alas! keeps more to the sofa. You will find Mary reading to him, and talking over his new book.’

‘His new book? I did not know he was bringing out a book.’

‘He has kept it a secret even from me. The first copies came this morning, and he was going to send you one of them by to-night’s post. It will be ten times the

pleasure to him to give it to you himself——but there, I must not tell you another word about it. You had better go to him at once, or he will have a grievance against me for detaining you.'

'How good and kind you are to my Lizzie, Mrs. Meyrick !' said Aunt Jane, in a trembling tone, when the two elder ladies were left alone.

'Nay, it is she who is good to us, my dear Mrs. Richter. We call her our Sunbeam. Hark at them ! They have seen her from the window. That is Mary's voice, and that—that sound you hear—is my poor son, hastening on his crutches to meet her. He knew she had not forgotten us, though she did strive to keep her secret. Oh ! my dear Mrs. Richter, how proud you must be of her ; how happy her success must make you !'

'It does, of course ; but she has no secret that I know of.'

'What ! do you mean to say that you don't know about it ?'

'I know there is something,' said Mrs.

Richter, calling to mind the vision of wealth that had so dazzled her that morning ; 'but dear Lizzie, though she is kinder and more loving than ever—if that is possible—has grown beyond me altogether.'

'That is what Matthew says : she stands a head and shoulders above everybody. Though she never told us, Matthew has found her out.'

'But what is the secret ?' exclaimed Mrs. Richter, excitedly.

'If you don't know it, I mustn't tell you, Mrs. Richter. You must have it from her lips, and not from mine. But I am sure it's true. Matthew has said so ; and Matthew is so clever. Here they all come together. See, he is moving along quite fast—just as he used to do long ago ; it's like a miracle ; and your Lizzie, who is also our Lizzie, has worked it. She is, as he says, the most wonderful girl that ever lived !'

## CHAPTER XL.

## THE SECRET.

In some book that Mrs. Richter had read in her childhood—full of woodcuts and allegories—there was a picture of Sorrow and Ill-Health being comforted by Wisdom ; which, as the three young folks came into view, Mary, in her robe of mourning, and Matthew Meyrick, pale and crippled, with Elizabeth Dart serene and smiling between them, recurred to her with a flash. The confidence they reposed in her, the belief they had in her powers, was as clearly to be read in the expression of their faces as the affection with which they regarded her. She had been received by them with rapture, though Mary had shed those natural tears, in response to her friend's sympathetic em-

brace, which rush to our eyes with every association with those whom we have lately lost. It seemed to both of them that they could have talked to her for hours, and never wearied tongue or ear ; but the information that she had brought Aunt Jane with her had caused them to postpone their confidences. To make one so dear to their visitor to feel that she was at home with all at the Look-out was their first thought. Never since 'dear Ernest's' time, nor possibly even then—for he had been more given to theology than sentiment—had little Mrs. Richter been made so much of. 'I really almost began to think, my dear,' she said afterwards to Lizzie, 'that I must have done something, either in a dream or in some other state of existence, to deserve it.'

Though they spoke of persons she had never seen—Mrs. Melburn and the Squire—she had heard so much of them from her niece that she had not that feeling of isolation and sense of 'being out of it' that is generally experienced under similar circum-

stances ; while, at the same time, it gratified her to be thus treated as one of the family. Nervous as she always was in the presence of mere acquaintances, it did not even alarm her very much when a wrinkled little man suddenly appeared in the centre of the group, and, after wringing Lizzie's hand as though he would wring it off, proceeded to shake her own as heartily.

'Of course, you are Aunt Jane,' he said, 'who, having repented of taking this young lady from her natural home, has brought her back to us and to what used to be Casterton.'

'The dear old place, however, looks very much as it used to do,' said Lizzie, laughing.

'It won't do that for long, my dear,' sighed the old gentleman ; 'we are going to be as spick and span as Clapton-on-Sea, or any other fashionable town that flames out of an advertisement. We shall have an esplanade, with a brass band playing on it from two to four, before we are many months older. His lordship will stick at nothing. The sacrilegious wretch has actually offered

Battle Hill for sale, with a hideous suggestion about its being adapted for building purposes.'

'But nobody has bought it, nor even bid for it; has he?'

'Not as yet; but it is only a question of time. They will buy it, and they will build villa residences upon it. What do they care for the relics of the dead and the memorials of their forefathers?'

'What if in digging the foundations of the villas they should come upon the buried treasure?' observed Lizzie, slyly.

'Don't speak of it!' exclaimed the old man, vehemently. 'If such an event should happen, it would be the death of me; and, I tell you, it *may* happen. The idea of a speculative builder becoming possessed of the spoil of the Dane has something blasphemous about it. Every time I go to that hill, I seem to feel it will be my last visit. There is a board up already, with "Trespassers Beware!" upon it; but that I take no notice of. I suppose it, in my own mind, to refer

to any wretches who may want to build there. Think of Urfa Terrace or Canute Crescent, and Sweyn Villas, defiling that grand old hill! But any one who chooses to go into John Martin's, yonder, with 500*l.* in his pocket, can begin that infamous work to-morrow; and nobody can stop him. However, I have no right to talk about a misfortune which affects no one, after all, but a poor antiquary like myself. Let us speak of a much pleasanter subject—your own affairs. We poor savages at Casterton always ventured, you know, to think you were a marvel; and that the idol of our barbarous little tribe should have become an object of worship in the world of London is immensely to the credit of our discernment.'

'It would be, without doubt, if the circumstance you mention had taken place,' replied Lizzie, laughing. 'Unhappily, however, there have been no offerings at the shrine.'

'There has been incense enough, at all events,' put in Matthew. 'I never open a

newspaper, my dear Miss Dart, without reading something eulogistic about you. Instead of laying siege to Fame in the usual fashion by approaches and parallels, you seem to have carried her by a *coup de main*.'

'They must be very old newspapers, I fear, in which you read anything about my poor production,' said Lizzie. 'It is quite true, indeed, that what I have contributed to the "Millennium" has been praised, much beyond my expectations and their worth ; but even three swallows don't make a summer.'

'My dear Mat,' murmured Mary, despondingly, 'I am afraid you must have made a mistake.'

'Not a bit of it,' he answered, under his breath. 'Don't you know a hypocrite when you see one? Look at that wicked blush.'

There was certainly a flush in Elizabeth Dart's cheek which might have been taken in an accused person, by a hostile judge, as an evidence of guilt.

'You are more in the dark, Miss Dart, than we are,' observed Roger Leyden,

gravely. ‘Would you mind coming into the light here, and letting me have a good long look at your face? It will be a great pleasure to me, even if I don’t find in it what I expect to see.’

‘You have already told my fortune, Sir, by starlight,’ she answered, lightly, ‘so there is no excuse for further investigation.’

‘Very good. Then we will tell Mrs. Richter’s fortune for her.’ He spoke so gently, and with such a tender respect in his tone, that Aunt Jane was not one whit alarmed by this alarming proposition.

‘There are plenty of lines to guide you,’ she answered, smiling, ‘but I am afraid they lead to nothing; or at least to a very poor fortune.’

‘I am not sure of that,’ said the antiquary, in solemn tones, and scrutinising her attentively: ‘you are, to begin with, very happy in your domestic relations, and people get fond of you at first sight.’

‘He is right, so far,’ cried Matthew, clapping his hands.

‘He is judging by results,’ objected Mary.

‘My dear Lizzie, how can you permit your aunt to be teased in this way?’ said Mrs. Meyrick.

‘Be quiet, all of you; you are interrupting the investigation,’ exclaimed Mr. Leyden, authoritatively. ‘If you are not famous yourself, my dear lady, you will become so by proxy. I am not quite sure which it will be; but you have much literary taste.’

‘There I am sure you are wrong,’ said Aunt Jane, laughing; ‘ask Lizzie.’

‘I shall not “ask Lizzie,” as Lizzie is not to be trusted. Lizzie will say anything, or decline to say anything. How do you know you have no literary taste? Don’t you like the novel, “The Usher,” that has just been begun in the “Millennium”?’

‘I have not read it; I never read anything in the “Millennium” except what Lizzie writes,’ answered Mrs. Richter, simply.

There was an uncomfortable silence. ‘Is it possible that the intelligence of this honourable court has been deceived?’ inquired

Roger Leyden, 'or is this witness mute of malice?'

'I have not the least idea what you are wanting to get out of me,' said Mrs. Richter, raising her eyebrows.

'She must be pressed to death,' said Roger Leyden, gravely. 'I don't see any other way out of it.'

'She is telling nothing but the truth, Roger,' observed Matthew, confidently : 'the principal criminal has, it seems, no confederate.'

'Do you mean to say, my dear Mrs. Richter,' exclaimed Mr. Leyden, impatiently, 'that you have no secret to tell us in connection with the accused ?'

'If you mean with Lizzie, none at all : nothing has been confided to me, I do assure you.'

'You have not chanced to hear that she is bringing out a book at all, perhaps ?' continued the inquisitor, severely.

'Not a word.'

Roger Leyden glanced with a puzzled air

at Matthew ; his look seemed to say, ‘Perhaps we are wrong after all.’ Matthew shook his head, and smiled incredulously.

‘ What is all this about ? ’ inquired Miss Dart, innocently. While these searching interrogations were being put to Aunt Jane she had been to all appearance engaged in private conversation with Mrs. Meyrick. “ Did I hear that any one had been bringing out a book ? ” Matthew moved to a side table and took from it a little parcel made up for the book-post, and addressed to herself. ‘ Your arrival, my dear Miss Dart,’ he said, placing it in her hands, ‘ has saved me six-pence.’

‘ This is charming, indeed ! ’ she exclaimed, delightedly. ‘ What a pleasant surprise, indeed, I have anticipated ! “ Poems by Matthew Meyrick ”—how very nice that looks ! Here are “ The Children,” “ The Harpsichord,” and all my old favourites. I know them all by heart, but I no less rejoice to hold them in my hand. They are published, I see, by Mr. Rose, of Paternoster

Row. I happen to know that gentleman, and shall congratulate him on his discernment. I congratulate you, my dear Matthew, with all my heart. I will not say, in time-worn phrase, that the casket is worthy of the jewel ; but the binding—though, I am afraid, all the bindings are not like this—is perfection.'

'Come, that was *my* choice!' exclaimed Mrs. Meyrick, triumphantly. 'I was determined to have a hand in dear Matthew's book, if it was only in the cover.'

Suddenly, Miss Dart, who was still turning over the leaves of the little volume, became crimson. 'She has seen it at last,' murmured Mary.

'You are right, Mat,' observed Roger Leyden, sententiously ; 'if ever conscious guilt was depicted in the human countenance, I behold it now. If your modesty forbids your reading that dedication aloud, Miss Dart, I will repeat it for you. "*To the Authoress of "The Usher," whose genius I admire, like the rest of the world; and whose friendship I should*

*envy above all things, did I not enjoy the advantage of possessing it.”*

‘I call that almost as pretty as the poem,’ observed Mrs. Meyrick, critically. Miss Dart had not yet spoken, but it was plain she was greatly agitated ; the little book trembled in her grasp.

It troubled her in many ways to know that her secret was revealed ; but it touched her to learn that Matthew had discovered what so many had failed to find ; it was his affection for her, no doubt, that had made his eyes so keen.

‘Whatever good fortune may befall me,’ she said, earnestly, ‘even though it should be deserved, I shall never value so highly as this unmerited proof of your regard for me, Matthew.’

‘Now what does she mean by unmerited ?’ put in the antiquary, sharply. ‘Is she still endeavouring to put us off the scent ?’

‘I meant the praise,’ she answered, gently. ‘I confess, I did write the book.’

Roger Leyden seized his cap and threw it

up to the ceiling ; Mrs. Meyrick and Mary clapped their hands ; and Matthew beat the floor in an ecstasy of applause. Aunt Jane alone made no demonstration : her lips trembled, and the tears came into her eyes. While rejoicing in her niece's success, her tender heart felt a thrill of pain that she had not been made the repository of a secret, to the knowledge of which others had doubtless been admitted. Miss Dart read all she felt at a single glance. 'If I had told anybody about it,' she said, 'of course it would have been you, Aunt Jane ; but I thought it better, in case of failure, to keep the matter to myself alone. How was it, Matthew, that you ever came to guess it ?'

'I recognised your hand throughout, Lizzie, as Mary will bear me witness ; but there were some touches which could have come from no other pen : the poor old clerk, about whom there was every "symptom of 'breaking up,' except the holidays ;" the priest, who knows no more of spiritual matters than an organ monkey knows of music ; and your

literary gentleman, who offers to take charge of the child in the crowd at the illuminations, on the ground that he is accustomed "to see things through the press," spoke to me unmistakably of Elizabeth Dart. There were some things, indeed, that puzzled me; but their very unlikeness to yourself somehow awoke my suspicions: the moralising old General, for example, who remarks "that men of middle age, who omit to play whist in the afternoons, generally get into mischief." Now where on earth did you get that from?"

Lizzie shrugged her shoulders, and laughed with an indifferent air; but in reality she resented the question: no novelist likes to be asked whence he took this and that. In this particular case, too, it so happened that Miss Dart had borrowed the observation from the cynical lips of Jefferson Melburn.

'There were some things, however, that localised you,' continued Matthew, 'and put the matter beyond doubt. Don't you recollect how amused you were with the old sexton here, and his technical expressions? Now,

there is a verger in your story who uses his very phrase—"When we depart this transeptory life."

‘To be sure,’ said Miss Dart. ‘I recollect it perfectly. How very, very foolish of me! To rob without concealment is the height of imprudence.’ She spoke with an air of vexation, but in her heart she was well pleased: it was that ‘transeptory life,’ she felt convinced, which had, in fact, betrayed her. All the other things were but corroborations; mere affection had not been that touchstone which she had thought and feared. If it *had* been, some one other than Matthew Meyrick, and a better critic, would surely, surely, have made as good a guess as he.

## CHAPTER XLI.

## A DEAL.

BEFORE Lizzie left the Look-out that evening —for it is needless to say that Aunt Jane and she were constrained to remain to dinner—she found the opportunity of having a private talk with Mary. She learnt that, though the Squire was still at Burrow Hall, his position was greatly altered ; he had lost large sums in speculation ; and the property was much involved. It had been obviously a relief to him when Mrs. Meyrick had proposed to take charge of his daughter. ‘I offered to stay with poor papa,’ said Mary, ‘but he did not want me. He said he wanted nobody. It will be very wretched for him. Jefferson and he have had some disagreement about the entail. He will come down, I believe, in the

shooting season, and then papa will go elsewhere. It is a miserable story.'

'And as to your own affairs, darling?' inquired Miss Dart.

'They can scarcely be called affairs,' she answered, smiling, 'they are so insignificant. I have a thousand pounds from dear mamma, the interest of which at present forms my pin-money. Whether I shall ever have anything more to live upon is doubtful. In the meantime, however, papa pays a certain sum for my maintenance to aunt. You must not blame him; he does as much as he can for me. Things do not look very bright, but they might have been much worse.'

Miss Dart knew what she meant—namely, that she might have been still suffering from the persecution of Mr. Winthrop, which had now ceased. She had always sympathised with Mary upon that matter; but much more since she herself had learned how hateful to a woman's mind it was possible for a man to be. It was a subject much too unwelcome to be pursued.

‘And Matthew?’

Mary’s face, which had hitherto been serene and cheerful, became troubled at once.

‘Matthew is no better. Oh! Lizzie, I fear, I fear, that he is getting worse. You see him now at his very best, because your coming has gladdened him. But sometimes —never before his mother, but only when we two are quite alone—it is very sad to hear him talk. It is not as if he did not wish to get well; he does wish it very much, poor fellow—but—’

‘That is so far in his favour,’ put in Lizzie, quickly. ‘It is only the incurable who has neither wish nor hope. His very desire for life will help him to hold on to it.’

Mary shook her head. ‘No, no; he feels it slipping from him, and that his grasp of it weakens almost daily. What will his mother do when he is gone?’

‘And what will *you* do?’ thought Lizzie to herself, as she gazed on her companion’s face, which, shadowed by the coming woe, had suddenly lost its look of youth, and

become grey and haggard. ‘ Mary, dear, I have got a plan for Matthew. He must come up to town and see Dr. Dredge.’

‘ Who is Dr. Dredge ? ’

‘ He is a physician who has made spinal complaint his peculiar study. When I tell you that Dr. Dalling once spoke to me about him, at Burrow Hall, as being the only man living likely to do Matthew good, you may be sure that he has some special gift. Your cousin, remember, has seen no one but a country doctor, in whom, moreover, he has himself but little confidence.’

‘ He has confidence in no one. He is convinced that no skill can possibly do him good ; while as to going up to town, the thought of the expense such a proceeding would entail would, I am sure, prevent him doing any such thing, even if he were more hopeful. “ There has been enough money wasted upon me already by my poor mother,” he says.’

‘ The cost is of no consequence. I have more money than I want, and nothing would please me so much as the spending of it to do

Matthew good. One of the things—indeed, the main thing—I have come down here about is to obtain, through you, his consent to try Dr. Dredge. I would have brought him down to see Matthew here, but that Mr. Argand tells me he will never leave town to visit anybody.'

‘ You good, dear girl ! ’ cried Mary, embracing her friend affectionately. ‘ I will tell Matthew what you offer, because it will please him so, but I warn you beforehand that he will not consent. “ What ? ” he will say, “ do you think I would take Lizzie’s money, which she has earned with her brain, any more than my dear mother’s, and throw it into the gutter ? ” ’

‘ But it may not be thrown into the gutter. It may bring health and strength, and, at all events, there is a chance of it. My plan is this—that Matthew and you, and Mrs. Meyrick, shall have our rooms, where we know that we can make you comfortable ; while Aunt Jane and I emigrate to the next floor.’

‘ That is, we are to evict as well as ruin you. Why, it would cost a fortune.’

‘ It would cost, perhaps, fifty pounds—perhaps a hundred. Let me tell you, Miss, I am now become a person of property, and that a hundred pounds would neither make me nor break me. You will not go into these details with Matthew, of course ; but I entreat of you to persuade him.’

‘ I will do my best, though I know that I shall fail. I shall be your debtor for what you would have done as long as I live.’

‘ I shall leave you two alone to-morrow morning,’ said Lizzie, ‘ to discuss the matter ; and I dare say Mrs. Meyrick will kindly take Aunt Jane off my hands till luncheon time, as I have a little business to transact upon my own account.’

‘ Not work, dear Lizzie ; I do hope you will take a complete holiday while you are down here. Mrs. Richter tells me that your pen is never out of your hand at home.’

‘ I promise you it is nothing to tax my brain,’ said Lizzie, laughing ; and here Roger

Leyden came up and pointed to the clock, which stood at a very late hour indeed, as hours were reckoned at Casterton. 'You will never keep your appointment with me on the hill to-morrow, Miss Dart, if you don't get some beauty sleep.'

'Oh, *that's* the business you have to transact which will not tax your brain, is it?' whispered Mary, roguishly. Lizzie nodded assent. 'To make an assignation with a young lady, Mr. Leyden, and then to talk about it, is not what is done in the best circles,' she observed, reproachfully.

Nevertheless, Mr. Leyden was permitted to escort the two ladies home to the inn.

'At eleven, then, punctually?' said Lizzie, as he took his leave.

'Why not at ten?'

'Because between ten and eleven I have something particular to do.'

'I never heard of anybody having anything particular to do in Casterton before,' grumbled the antiquary; 'but you always have your way. At eleven, then, let it be.'

Aunt Jane and Lizzie breakfasted early the next morning—earlier, indeed, than the latter desired, for her own purposes ; but it was impossible to restrain the elder lady's energy. ' Every moment that I spend indoors,' she said, ' I grudge. I want to drink in as much of this glorious air, to see as much of this lovely spot, as possible. It is not to be expected that I shall have such a holiday again. It seems to me that the whole scene will melt if once I take my eyes off it.'

' Then you would really like to live here ? '

' Dont, Lizzie, don't ; it is cruel. The very notion of leaving it, as we must do to-morrow, I suppose, or the next day, appals me. Don't let me know when I am going till it is time to pack up. In the meantime, I am living here.'

' Quite right ; " life is but thought," said Lizzie, smiling at her tenderly. ' For the present, consider yourself a resident. Would you think it very unkind of me if I left you to your own devices for an hour or two this

morning, though Mrs. Meyrick, you know, said she expected you after breakfast ?'

'She is very good, and they are all as good to me as good can be ; but I should like a little walk by the sea alone above all things. Somehow or other, Lizzie—I suppose it's the vastness and freedom of it—I always feel a better woman at the sea.'

'Then what a good woman you would be if you lived here !'

'Don't, Lizzie ; don't, I say. I am no more fit for it than to live in Heaven. Look at that sea-gull ! Not all the pigeons in the Marylebone Road can compare with it.'

'If you go to the jetty—it's the first turning to the right—you'll see plenty of them. If I don't join you there, you'll find me at the Look-out.'

Aunt Jane trotted off in the direction indicated, like a child on a holiday. She had no doubt that Lizzie had some of that wonderful literary work to do, which, considering the praise it brought, not to mention that sheaf of bank-notes which had dazzled her eyes the

previous morning, seemed to her to have something of magic about it. Even that great work 'The Life of Apollinaris' sank into insignificance beside it. She did not even dare to advise her niece not to work, as Mary had done, though she longed to do so. Lizzie knew what was good for her, and for everybody, so much better than she did. How everybody who knew what she had done bowed down before her ; never was there, surely, such a wonderful young woman. Dear Ernest had always said that it was much better to be good than clever (a remark which he had not the least idea was of an egotistic character) ; but Lizzie was as good, if that was possible, as she was clever.

Almost opposite the inn was the office of Mr. Snugg, the auctioneer and estate agent. As there was nothing to sell to anybody at Casterton, and no estate except Lord Destray's, even this double-barrelled business could not have brought him in much profit, but he was also a carpenter and builder. He had a front shop dedicated to the two humbler trades,

where turning and planing were carried on, and a back parlour, hung with maps and plans, devoted to the agency.

In the latter apartment he was rarely to be found, not only because there was little to do there, but because it had only a bit of a skylight, and afforded no view save of the heavenly bodies. He liked to behold his fellow-creatures, and to mitigate the asperities of toil by conversation with the passers-by. A half-door, which communicated with the street, facilitated this ; and any summer day Mr. Snugg was to be seen, leaning on the lower half, and looking up the street and down the street—if not for a customer, at least for a companion. We hear people talk of the Mysteries of London Life, as regards the existence of a considerable portion of its inhabitants ; and how on earth its poor women keep body and soul together is indeed difficult to understand ; but how small shop-keepers continue to live and thrive in the country is, to my mind, much more amazing. The only explanation of the phenomenon is

that they have all a few thousands in the Three per Cents., and that their affectation of carrying on business is merely a philanthropic pretence ; so that the youthful beholder of their unparalleled prosperity may set it down to the magic of Perseverance.

Mr. Snugg's carpenter and builder's business opened early, but his auction and estate agency was not in working order till ten a.m. To the former he attended in his shirt sleeves, and edified the gossips by his Radical views ; but when concerning himself with the latter, he was no longer Snugg the joiner, but an individual of great respectability, with a stake in the country, and opinions appropriate to that elevated position.

When Miss Dart issued from the Welcome that morning, Mr. Snugg was in his chrysalis state, and rather less 'within his gates' than without them ; his three-quarter length was stretched over the half-door, where the disappearance of Mrs. Richter round the corner had left it.

The spectacle of a stranger in Casterton

was calculated to arouse excitement in the mind of any native ; and Mr. Snugg, in addition to his multifarious callings, was the most inveterate of gossips. But for this preoccupation of his mind, the presence of Miss Dart at his elbow would certainly not have escaped him.

‘ A fine morning, Mr. Snugg.’

‘ Why, Miss Dart, I do declare ! Glad to see you back at Casterton.’

‘ Thank you, Mr. Snugg. Yes ; I have come down with my aunt from London for a few days.’

‘ The strange lady just gone to the jetty, I suppose ; I was wondering who she was. Strangers here are a godsend—though old friends are much more so, I’m sure,’ here he bowed politely ; ‘ nothing new here, but New-Year’s Day, from one year’s end to another.’

‘ You are contemplating something new, at all events—if, as I hear, old Battle Hill is to be sold.’

‘ The Loomp ? True ; but who’ll buy it ? ’

replied Mr. Snugg, despondently. ‘ It’s only a bit of unproductive land, with a few fir-trees on it, you see—like a poor peer with his coronet. It’s cheap enough, ’tis true, but then if nobody wants it ——’

‘ I think I know of some one who would like to have it, if it is really, as you say, to be sold cheap.’

‘ You do?’ he snatched off the carpenter’s cap which he wore at work, and threw back the half-door. ‘ If you will be kind enough to step into the office, Miss Dart, I will be with you in a minute, and furnish you with all particulars.’

It was really not much more than a minute before he reappeared, no longer as Snugg the joiner, but in his auctioneer-and-estate-agent apparel.

‘ The Hill has already been put up for sale, I believe,’ observed Miss Dart.

‘ Well, yes ; the reserved price of 500*l.* was not realised. As I explained to his lordship, sufficiently long notice had not been given, nor was the matter advertised as

it should be. We shall be more fortunate next time, no doubt.'

'But in the meanwhile, as I read in the newspaper, 500*l.* was the price.'

'That is so — to a certain extent : to builders who wanted a site, in consideration of the advantages that would arrive to the estate, there might be——'

'My friend is not a builder.'

'As I concluded. A man of taste, fond of the picturesque, perhaps, and of antiquities ? To such a person the situation for a villa residence would be unrivalled. The Hill has been in the Destray family for centuries. That of itself is a recommendation; and the present lord, when a boy, has often picnicked upon it, he told me, with the present members of the family: quite an aristocratic nook. The western slope affords good opportunities for a mansion in the Gothic style.'

'My friend would not desire a mansion ; his object in possessing the Hill would be to erect upon it a small cottage ; but I am afraid the purchase-money, combined with the cost

of such a dwelling, would be above his means.'

'A very pretty cottage could be built under the lee of that hill ; quite sheltered, and with a splendid view, for, let us say 400*l.*'

'Would you undertake to build it yourself, Mr. Snugg, for that money ?'

'Well, well ; I was speaking in general terms—though the materials, to be sure, are close at hand. It was not as if you were asking me for an estimate, Miss Dart.'

'Not exactly, yet the person I have in my mind would, I think, prefer the matter to be in local hands, and you will certainly have my good word, Mr. Snugg. On the other hand, 900*l.* is, I fear, more than he is in a position to give.'

'Just so ; that is, of course, a difficulty,' said Mr. Snugg, smoothing his chin as though he were removing the obstacle in question. 'I think, however, I may fairly say to his lordship, "Here is an offer of 450*l.*, or even 400*l.*, for the Hill ; not, indeed, from a professional builder, but from a gentleman of taste, who

has given me his word to employ an architect who may be trusted to beautify rather than disfigure the locality." Yes ; I think I should be doing his lordship a service, Miss Dart, in persuading him, under the circumstances you have mentioned, to take 400*l.* for Battle Hill.'

'Very good. I have the purchase money in my possession, and if the matter can be concluded in a day or two, before I leave the town, I shall be obliged to you.'

'I will have a memorandum that will be binding prepared by to-morrow morning, if you will kindly give me the gentleman's name.'

'You may make it out in my name, Mr. Snugg.'

'In your name ? Well, now, really, Miss Dart, this is a satisfactory circumstance,' said the agent, rubbing his hands deferentially. 'It is seldom, indeed, that business and pleasure are so mixed. With a lady already so well known in Casterton, and, if I may venture to add, so favourably inclined towards

myself, there can be no sort of difficulty about the estimate about the cottage ; and, as to the purchase money for the Hill, you may take it for certain that it will not exceed 400*l.*.'

## CHAPTER XLII.

## CONGRATULATED.

To judge by the talk about the 'hunger for land,' one would suppose that when the earth beneath us is our own property, we tread it with a more assured and vigorous step, while, at the same time, we strike the stars with our head. I had a little land myself once, but experienced no such sensations on the spot in question ; and was exceedingly glad to get rid of it. For my part, I can no more conceive of the earth as mine—in the same sense, at least, that the five shillings in my pocket are my own —than of the sea or the sky belonging to me. Similarly, it was with no sense of proprietorship that Miss Dart drew near Battle Hill, though to all intents and purposes she had bought it. That she had secured a house, or

rather a spot whereon to build a house, for Aunt Jane and herself in a locality that both delighted in, was, however, a conviction sufficiently pleasurable without any territorial pride ; and that that spot was Battle Hill was also a subject of especial congratulation on her friends' account. With what delight would Mrs. Meyrick and Mary and Matthew receive the news that, sooner or later, she would become their neighbour ; and with what rapture would Roger Leyden welcome it ! She found him looking out for her from the hill top.

‘ You are better than your word,’ he cried, holding out his hand.

‘ I got my business over more quickly than I expected,’ she replied.

‘ And it was done well, as well as quickly, I’ll be bound. You look as if your ideas were still in full flow.’

‘ I think it was done rather well,’ she answered. She was secretly very proud of the bargain she had effected with Mr. Snugg ; not only as a personal achievement, but on broader and higher grounds. It was always said of

literary persons that they were unfit for practical affairs, and she flattered herself that she had taken that reproach away from their profession by her manipulation of Mr. Snugg that morning.

‘This is like old times,’ said the antiquary. ‘I hardly hoped ever to stand with you on Battle Hill again, with the same feelings.’

‘Yet I am not very prone to change,’ remarked Miss Dart, quietly.

‘That is true. You will be always natural ; you will estimate things at their just value ; no tumult of acclaim will ever turn your head. I was speaking of the place itself, which will sooner or later undergo terrible alterations.’

‘You mean, if it is sold?’

‘It is sure to be sold.’

‘Yet the reserve price, I understand, was not bidden when the lot was put up for auction.’

‘The reserve price? That is Snugg’s story. It is quite true that no one bid 500*l.*

for the hill, nor 50*l.* The fact is, nobody wanted it.'

'But would it be sold for less than 500*l.*?'

'Well, of course it would. To my certain knowledge, it was offered to Bolt, the grazier, for 350*l.*'

'Goodness gracious!' said Miss Dart.

'Fact, I assure you. I had almost a mind to sell all I had in the world and buy it myself, though I know it would be my ruin. If Battle Hill were mine, I *must* dig for the treasure. The temptation is still tremendous. I dream about it ; I lie awake and think about it. It might cost ten thousand pounds to find it, you say ; but it might also cost only a five-pound note ; and if I bought the hill I should have about five pounds to spare. Every time I pass Snugg's shop I feel inclined to go in and buy it, lest somebody else should, like the dog in the manger.'

'But why is it not bought?'

'Because, except for building purposes, it is absolutely useless ; and, at present, the builders don't see their way. Of course, they

will see it some day ; in the meantime, it is possible that some sacrilegious wretch will take a fancy to it, and purchase it for his own pleasure. That would be better, of course, than to see it fall into the hands of the Philistines of the line and plummet ; but, still, it would be terrible. He would put up a notice, “ This is Private,” and gates at the foot of the hill, which would be open to the public on Saturday afternoons only.’

‘ Such a creature would build a house upon it, I suppose ? ’ observed Miss Dart.

‘ Of course he would ; the most hideous house conceivable.’

‘ And where would he put it ? or rather, where would you put it, if you were he ? ’

‘ The two suppositions are quite distinct,’ observed the antiquary, drily. ‘ *He* would put it where his architect advised him—facing the south and west, so as to suck in the fogs from the marsh and shut out the town. *I* should put it in yonder coomb, where I could see the old castle and the jetty, and at night the harbour light.’

‘And the Pavilion and the Look-out,’ murmured Miss Dart.

‘Of course. But what would the monster we have in our minds care about such things?’

‘Dear Mr. Leyden, I am that monster ; I have bought Battle Hill. I mean to build not a house, but a little cottage in that coomb, where I propose to spend my life.’

‘You! *You* have bought it?’ cried the antiquary, solemnly. ‘It is the finger of Fate!’ His eyes wandered over the hill, and then came back to her confident face, with a strange look of care in them.

‘And have you not a word of congratulation to give me? Are you not pleased that I am about to be your neighbour, as I hope to be?’

‘Yes; yes, indeed. I am more glad than words can say; it will bring happiness, too, to other hearts than mine. “For life,” you say; yes, and to your children after you. Some day or other my prophecy will come to pass, and you or yours will find what Urfa buried here.’

‘Well, since it was you who first put it into my mind to buy the hill, I promise you this, Mr. Leyden—that if I do find the treasure you shall have half of it.’

‘You are joking! You cannot be serious! Do you really mean that you will make it over to me or my representatives?’

‘Certainly; I never was more serious in my life,’ she answered, gravely. ‘Unfortunately, I am not so generous as I wish to be thought, because I am incredulous as to the existence of the thing in question. But you shall have a written undertaking—you shall draw it up yourself, and I will sign it—to satisfy you upon the point. On the other hand, I must say at once that I shall not spend sixpence in digging to look for it.’

‘That’s not to be expected,’ assented the antiquary; ‘nor, indeed, would I have you risk anything in such a search. I am not so grasping as I seem, indeed.’

‘You don’t even seem grasping, Mr. Leyden,’ said Miss Dart, smiling.

‘I must, at all events, appear very selfish

in having shown no curiosity to know how you have acquired your proud position of landed proprietor. For the moment, the sense of your golden expectations put out of my head the humbler means by which you came into them.'

'Pray do not say expectations, Mr. Leyden, for I have none.'

'Well, then, possibilities. You know that it is personal interest, and not impertinence, that prompts the inquiry ; but where on earth did you get the money from ? The pen nowadays coins gold, I hear, but the "Millennium" does not pay at that rate ; and "The Usher" is only just begun.'

'It is "The Usher," nevertheless, to which I am indebted for Battle Hill. I have sold the use of the novel for five years for a thousand pounds.'

'Heavens and Earth ! I was an "Usher" myself once, and never made a tenth of the money.'

'Nevertheless, it's not a fortune ; and I can well imagine that many people will think

me very foolish for spending so much of my little all in such a purchase. But dear Aunt Jane and I have had such a bad time of it, and she for so much longer than I, that we two yearn for peace and quiet ; also, thanks to you, I have learnt to love Battle Hill very dearly. Moreover, when the cottage is built, we shall live here as cheaply as anywhere. You may say, indeed, it is difficult to live even cheaply, if one has nothing to live upon ; but as to the future, I am content to take my chance. At present I am young and in health, and what I have done in the writing way I feel confident I can do again, and perhaps again, and even better.'

'That is a noble confidence,' exclaimed the antiquary, admiringly, 'and, I will be sworn, well founded. But, though I say it to my own disadvantage, you must not bury yourself alive at Casterton. For a poet, it is well enough : he communes with the stars ; but you must mix with that world it is your mission (or I am greatly mistaken) to describe.'

‘I feel that,’ answered his companion, simply. ‘It is my purpose, if all goes well, to live here all the summer long ; to come whenever I need rest and quiet, and to make this glorious spot my home. But in the winter I shall live in London. That is what you would have suggested, is it not ? Why do you look so grave ?’

‘Did I look grave ? I meant to look glad. Such good fortune following on good desert is rare, indeed. It seems to redress the balance—restore the average of happiness.’ His eyes were fixed upon the Look-out.

‘You were thinking of those to whom the cup of life has been dealt in another measure,’ said Miss Dart. ‘I, too, believe me, have not forgotten them.’

‘I am sure you have not. There are some hearts—a very few—that melt beneath the sun of prosperity ; that seem to grow more tender to the woes of others the further they themselves are removed from woe. Let us go down and gladden our dear friends yonder with the news of your good fortune.’

‘I must not tell them till I have bought the Hill ; that will not be till to-morrow. There may be a slip between the cup and the lip. Aunt Jane was saying yesterday that Casterton seemed too beautiful, to be real ; that she was afraid it would melt before her eyes, and that is what I feel with respect to this darling scheme of mine.’

## CHAPTER XLIII.

## THE SHADOW IN THE SUNSHINE.

THAT it never rains but it pours, in the sense of sorrows not befalling us singly, is a proverb that few of us poor mortals are found to deny ; but there is no similar saw in connection with prosperity. The Greeks of old were absolutely afraid of great good luck—so very rare was it, in their time, that Fortune gave men a lift without a back-hander to follow ; and the Scotch have a term for good spirits which itself presages misfortune. Elizabeth Dart was grateful from the bottom of her heart for the good things which had befallen her ; but she feared no Nemesis, and had no misgivings. Without for one moment endorsing Roger Leyden's view of desert in the matter, she was too honest to belie her own

talents ; and, indeed, regarded them almost as judiciously as though they belonged to some one else ; they had been appreciated by the public far beyond her hopes, and been rewarded materially far beyond her expectations ; but, though she had under-estimated the value of what she had produced, she had not under-estimated its merit. She was as free from mock modesty on the one hand as she was from vanity on the other. It was impossible for her to shut her eyes to the fact that, considering the scanty nature of her performances, they had already made a great and unusual success ; while the manner in which ‘The Usher’ had been received was more encouraging still. Nor did she judge from results alone ; she had a sense of proportion rare in her sex, and though what she had effected of course fell far short of what she had proposed to herself—for expression can never convey our ideas with the perfection we desire—her work held its own, and more than its own, by comparison with the best specimens of her contemporaries. She recognised, in fact, if she

did not actually acknowledge to herself, the true nature of those aspirations which had always dwelt within her ; and that circumstance filled her with the best kind of confidence—the consciousness of power. There are some writers, and very good ones, who are the Single-speech Hamiltons of literature ; they embody their experience of life in a single book, and then have done with it, from sheer lack of material ; they have no deposit in the Bank of Imagination. If they make a second attempt, they overdraw their account. Now, Elizabeth Dart was conscious of possessing resources for much more than one campaign. Exceptional as she was in many ways, she also held peculiar views of life. She desired money only for the happiness which it conferred, though by no means on herself only ; indeed, she had discovered early that the greatest happiness is to be found in conferring it ; and where most people thought of increase, she thought of enjoyment.

One of the richest men I ever knew—but by no means the worst—came by accident to

his death, when he had only made a million or so. The whole energies of his existence had been spent in acquiring wealth, and, long after there had been the least necessity for it, he had worked harder than any clerk who consumes the midnight oil to add the payment of 'overtime' to the scanty subsistence he earns for his wife and family. And on his deathbed he repented it. 'I wish, my dear friends,' he murmured, pathetically, 'that I had enjoyed myself a little more.' It was not, to be sure, a very exalted aspiration at such a moment ; but there was a good deal of sense in it. His mistake was a very common one with energetic and assiduous persons. Elizabeth Dart, who was as diligent in her way as this dead Dives had ever been, had not fallen into his error. She had had, as she had told Mr. Leyden, a hard life of it, and seen those she loved enduring still worse things ; and, while detesting idleness, she had a passionate yearning for peace and comfort—a wholesome desire for enjoyment, as different from the mere love of pleasure as the parson's whist differs from the

gambling at Monaco. Though not so fortunate as the Fool in the Scripture, who had goods laid up for him for many years, she had reason to feel that her future was provided for—a reflection the surpassing comfort of which can be only understood by those who have no such provision.

Never in all her life had she felt so happy; the only drawback to her supreme content, in fact, was the obligation she had enjoined upon herself to keep from her friends the secret of her purchase of Battle Hill until the matter was actually effected. The information that the land had already been offered for a less sum than the lowest she was about to pay had considerably shaken her confidence in Mr. Snugg, and also in her own capabilities for dealing with him ; so the rest of the arrangements she intrusted to Roger Leyden, a shrewd man of business enough, when not under the influence of the stars, or riding the hobby-horse of antiquity.

For all her prudent resolves, it is possible that she would not have been able to conceal

from the loving eyes of those of the Look-out the unaccustomed exaltation of her spirits, had she not elsewhere found an excuse for them. Quite a large packet of letters had arrived for her from London, all of which contained good and even great news. They had been forwarded to her from the 'Millennium' office by Mr. Argand, but accompanied—as she noticed with some chagrin—by no line from himself. She had told him of her intention of coming down to Casterton, and she had thought he might have written to her a few words of congratulation in finding herself in a spot which he knew was so dear to her. She felt that it had now become necessary—since others had discovered it—to confess to him that she was the author of 'The Usher,' and the avowal was somehow made more difficult to her by his silence. Was it possible that he had found it out for himself, and was displeased, or even hurt, at her reticence ?

It struck her, for the first time, that it was possible that a copy of Matthew's poems might have been sent to the 'Millennium' office ; in

which case the dedication of it, had it met Mr. Argand's eye, would certainly have revealed her secret to him. This idea would have troubled her more, but for the contents of her letters, the importance of which for the moment monopolised her thoughts. They were all addressed, of course, to 'John Javelin, Esq.' Some of them were, as usual, applications for autographs ; others, equally as usual, bore invitations to 'at-homes' and even dinner-parties, from unknown 'lion hunters,' who have never the least scruple about the means they use to ensnare their prey. She had often received such communications, but never so many at a time. It was clear that her third contribution to the 'Millennium,' 'Opinion in Stories,' had greatly quickened the public curiosity about her. Such things are straws—but straws which show the direction in which the wind is blowing. There were three letters of another sort. No. 1 was from a firm of publishers, offering to purchase 'The Usher,' when completed, at the same price for which Mr. Rose had agreed with

her. ‘If, unhappily, that novel should have been disposed of, Messrs. Blank and Asterisk would be happy to make arrangements with the author for the copyright of his next story, on still more favourable terms.’

This communication was gratifying enough, yet it amazed even more than it pleased her. The rate at which news flies —out of which any profit is to be got—has never yet been calculated by the arithmetician ; and it astonished Miss Dart to find that the identity of John Javelin with the author of ‘The Usher’ had been already discovered by an entire stranger. That it was somehow or other owing to the publication of Matthew’s poems was certain, since Mr. Rose —who had his own reasons for keeping silence on the subject—had been the only repository of her secret.

No. 2 letter was from the proprietor of a popular magazine, offering a large sum for the serial right of publication of the successor to ‘The Usher.’ That there should be a successor it was taken for granted, as though it were a

case of 'The King is dead. Long live the King !' As the copyright was not required in this instance, the arrangement for the sale of the book could probably be made with No. 1, independently from the proposal from the magazine.

No. 3 was from a newspaper association, to the same effect as No. 2, but promising still more liberal terms. The writer, it said, 'as a secretary to the syndicate,' was also empowered to offer a considerable portion of the purchase-money in advance. In these propositions what would have seemed to her a few weeks ago a fortune, and what was, at all events, a large income, was assured to her for the next twelve months. If she had read her news aloud to her friends at the Look-out, it would have conferred almost as much pleasure upon them as it gave herself. They were not as the stranger 'who does but intermeddle with our joy ;' the brightness of her prosperity would have gladdened them, and cast no shadow. But she remembered their own poverty, and only spoke of the

encouragement she had received in general terms. It is an unusual reticence ; for nothing is more common than for the prosperous to boast of their superfluous wealth in the presence of those to whom every shilling, as the phrase goes, is of consequence ; though —like Narcissa—they would hardly, perhaps, dilate upon their last banquet to persons in want of a dinner. The heartfelt congratulations of her friends were not less enjoyable to Lizzie because her mind was occupied with thoughts of how her new-found wealth could best be used in serving them. If death could not be averted (and she secretly nourished a hope that somehow it might be so) from that hospitable door, poverty, at least, she resolved, should never set foot in it. If money ever brought a happy day, it was that day. At eve fell its first shadow. On returning to the inn before dinner, she found a letter from Mr. Argand.

‘ My dear Miss Dart,—Though somewhat late—for the world has known your secret,

it appears, for some days—I hasten to congratulate you most heartily and sincerely upon your well-earned honours. If I do not say “I am not surprised,” it is not because I entertained the least doubt of your genius or dreamt of assigning to it any limit ; it is only that it seems a little strange that you should have reposed a confidence in others which was denied to myself. You will, perhaps, justly reply that a professional critic should have discovered this mystery for himself, or that the personal interest with which I hope you will credit me should have given me some clue to it. Well, I do not defend myself. I will now take comfort from the reflection that my ignorance enabled me to speak of “The Usher” to your own ear in such terms of eulogy as, for fear of being suspected of flattery, I could hardly have employed had I known you to be its author. It is something, too, gained on your part, to have acquired a critic’s real opinion without those “buts” and “ifs” in whose company it always appears when he is on his guard. Before you, my dear Miss

Dart, lies the most pleasant literary future that has ever presented itself to one of your sex and age; I shall watch it with the utmost interest from afar. Perhaps, after all, it is the fact that I am about to relinquish my position as an editor—or, I should rather say, the circumstances which have compelled me to accept that course—which has made me blind to your handiwork. When the mind is full of business matters it loses its delicacy of discernment. There is one thing of a material kind that gives me much trouble in connection with your admirable story—it was offered by the unknown author to the “Millennium” for a sum out of all proportion, as is now abundantly manifest, to its value. It was, no doubt, your modest judgment of his merits that caused you to put so insignificant a price upon it; but I need hardly say that had I continued to direct the magazine, this mistake would have been rectified. In view of the great increase of circulation which “The Usher” has conferred upon it, some new arrangement would indeed appear imperative.

These matters are now unfortunately out of my hands, and may possibly be without remedy. I remember in one of our early talks together, you spoke (as it seemed to me without reason) of one of the chief drawbacks of your condition in life as being the inability to do good : how much worse, then, you will easily understand, is the position of one who cannot do even simple justice. However, let us have done with vain regrets. One would think this was a letter of condolence rather than of congratulation. As I have often told you, it is only a matter of "how long" as to when genius such as yours receives its recognition ; but the most consoling reflection which I shall carry with me into obscurity is that while I played my part as a stage manager of literature I had the great happiness of bringing before the footlights one of its brightest ornaments. My sister unites her most kind regards with mine, and I am always, my dear Miss Dart, your most faithful friend and well-wisher,

'FELIX ARGAND.'

## CHAPTER XLIV.

## MR. LEYDEN'S REPRESENTATIVE.

THE arrangements at the Welcome were primitive, and it was fortunate for Miss Dart that this letter had been brought to her own room instead of being left, as usual, to await the return of the ladies in the sitting-room ; its effect upon her could hardly have been concealed from any spectator, much less from such loving eyes as those of Aunt Jane. The colour, which expectation had evoked in her face as she opened the missive, faded gradually from cheek and lip as she perused it ; when she concluded it, it seemed to her that her very heart had stopped beating. To learn that by her reticence she had hurt so kind and dear a friend was distressing enough to her ; but, to her mind, it was only too clear that

there was something more amiss with Felix Argand than wounded feelings. That some heavy misfortune of a material kind had befallen him she was convinced, and even behind that must needs lurk something worse to have caused him to give up that beloved offspring of his own creation, the 'Millennium.' He had, indeed, on a previous occasion hinted at the possibility of its passing into other hands; but his words had had no immediate, nor, as it seemed, any very practical significance. They had been uttered like the 'If anything happens to me' of the parent still far from old age and in good health, when he speaks of the provision made for his children. 'Whoever is editor of the "Millennium,"' he had said, 'your support, you may be sure, will be always welcome to him.' But now, it seemed to her, the reins of government had been wholly surrendered—nay, snatched—out of his hands.

On most occasions of social catastrophe, the cause of which is unknown, imagination has only too free scope to search for it; the

answer to that ‘What *can* he have done?’ may assume any shape, however monstrous. But in this case, of one thing, at least, Elizabeth Dart was certain—that whatever Felix Argand had done, it was nothing to be ashamed of. Her opinion of him was the highest she had ever entertained of any man, and it stood upon a rock. Her feelings towards him had hitherto, indeed, been of the nature of those of a worshipper towards his patron saint; she had regarded him as guide, philosopher, and friend, but less as friend, perhaps, than as in the former characters; she had had an affectionate respect for him that was, even yet, not unmixed with awe. But now that he was in trouble, her sentiments experienced a sudden change. He seemed to be drawn nearer to her, and, without losing his noble attributes, to appear in a more familiar garb. She had never feared him with that fear which casts out love; but her admiration for his character had placed him on a pedestal out of the reach of familiar recognition; now she saw him as he was—very

sorrowful, and therefore very human ; and she yearned, in vain, to comfort him.

He had, evidently, no expectation of comfort from her. Like some monarch fallen from his high estate, he seemed to wrap his kingly robes about him for the last time, and to take a dignified adieu of those who had stood about his throne. But there was no evidence of emotion : he sought for no sympathy, far less for consolation. He had befriended many like herself, as she knew ; perhaps there were others to whom he had addressed similar words of farewell. She said this to herself, yet found herself unwilling to believe the speaker. Not even Felix Argand could have been so kind to any other as he had been to her. With what judgment had he advised her ! With what praise had he encouraged her ! With what enthusiasm had he fought her battles ! Each act of friendship he had shown recurred to her with marvellous particularity ; from the first letter he had written to her, as an unknown correspondent, down to that evening when he had been so

indignant against the poor man who had said her essays ‘were not literature.’ Though it was now evident that he had thought far more highly of ‘The Usher’ than of her earlier productions—indeed, if it was good at all, it stood on a much higher plane, as being a far more ambitious performance—how courteously he had refrained from hinting at it, lest he should wound her susceptibilities. His behaviour, indeed, at all times had been marked by the tenderest delicacy. Was there not something in this very letter, it suddenly struck her, that seemed to savour of a wish to spare her—something omitted, rather than hinted, which suggested separation? It was, on the face of it, only a letter of farewell, inasmuch as it announced a dissolution of their literary connection as editor and contributor; but, between the lines, there suddenly seemed to appear a purpose of departure. Why was there not one word said of her return to town, or of any time when they might again meet one another? When once this idea had obtained entrance into her mind

it grew, like the enchanted helmet in the Castle of Otranto, till it gradually filled every chamber of it. If she was right in her surmise, if Mr. Argand was really contemplating not only the relinquishment of his review, but his leaving London—or, perhaps, England itself—it was strange, indeed, that his sister, at least, should not have written to her of his intention. But, on the other hand, Miss Argand—though she occasionally rebelled against him—was, on the whole, a loyal subject to her brother, and, if he had enjoined silence upon her with respect to any subject, would certainly keep it.

When we are young, balmy sleep is easily wooed, and will endure much before she forsakes us; but Elizabeth Dart scarce closed her eyes that night, so consumed she was with vague alarms; so importuned by the incessant thought, ‘What is Felix Argand’s trouble, and what can I do to help him?’

In the morning, while they were still at breakfast, Roger Leyden was announced.

In any other case Miss Dart, who had a

high opinion of his judgment, would have asked his opinion upon the matter that was oppressing her ; but she justly considered that Mr. Argand's affairs should not be discussed with one who was a stranger to him.

There was something, too, in the antiquary's manner of self-conscious importance and ill-concealed satisfaction that would of itself have discouraged a confidence that sought for sympathy. He accepted her invitation to partake of their meal, though she knew he had already breakfasted, and was unusually vivacious and talkative. She guessed, as she thought, the reason of the exaltation of his spirits, and but yesterday would have shared them. He was to undertake that little matter of business for her with Mr. Snugg that morning, and was no doubt elated with the prospect. The looks he cast at her and then at the unconscious Mrs. Richter were full of sly significance : once when the widow thanked him for his offer to show her the wonders of the castle,

he replied that it was only his 'duty to his neighbour.'

'We must not be too sure,' murmured Miss Dart, gravely.

It was even in her mind to put an end for the present to the negotiations at which he hinted, altogether ; she had now no heart for it ; it seemed an ungrateful and ungracious thing to be thinking of her own gratification when misfortune, as she felt certain, was dogging the heels of her good friend in town. But Mr. Leyden only smiled at her warning whisper : smiled and winked, and tapped his breast pocket, which she then noticed for the first time had an unusual protrusion.

'You don't mean to say you have done it?' exclaimed Lizzie, surprised out of herself.

'Indeed, I do ; there is nothing wanting to complete the bargain but your signature. I was so frightened at what you said yesterday about the cup and the lip, that I called on Snugg this morning, before office hours, and

settled everything. 'I've got it here,' and again he tapped his pocket exultingly.

'What is it Mr. Leyden has got for you, my dear?' inquired Aunt Jane, who was dissecting a shrimp.

The antiquary threw a glance at Lizzie, which seemed to say, 'Shall I tell her?' It was a pleasure she had reserved for herself; but somehow the good news had lost its savour. She very willingly left the pleasant task to Mr. Leyden.

'It is Battle Hill,' said the antiquary, brimming over with his secret. 'I had quite a difficulty in getting it into my pocket; but here it is,' and he laid a bulky document upon the table. Mrs. Richter looked at Lizzie with apprehension. Though she liked Roger Leyden very well, she had been from the first a good deal afraid of him; she had heard of his doings with the stars, and his wanderings on the Hill; but it now struck her that he was something more than eccentric—stark, staring mad.

'Mr. Leyden only means that I have

bought the Hill, Aunt Jane,' said Lizzie, reassuringly.

'Bought the Hill? bought the Hill?' murmured the little widow. She looked towards the door this time, for she began to think that her niece had also taken leave of her senses.

'Yes, I have bought it; or as good as bought it. I hope to build a little cottage on it one day, for you and me to live in together.'

'It is impossible, Lizzie; it is too good to be true.'

'Why should it not be true, Aunt Jane?' answered her niece, caressingly. 'You are as good as can be; yet you are not too good to be true. It has been your experience hitherto, I know, that nothing that is pleasant can be meant for you. I hope, please God, that life will henceforth have a brighter side for you.'

'A brighter side—to live here in this lovely spot—and with you, Lizzie—it seems like Heaven itself.'

‘It is also like Heaven, in being some little way off at present,’ said Lizzie, smiling. ‘It must be a long time before we begin to build our nest.’

‘But you have made sure of the tree,’ said the antiquary, exultingly; ‘that is the great point; you have only to come across the way and set your hand to this document in the presence of witnesses, and Battle Hill is yours. It must be a great satisfaction to you, my dear Mrs. Richter, to possess a niece who is a landed proprietor.’

‘She is everything she ought to be, I’m sure,’ said Aunt Jane, approvingly. ‘Would you mind, my dear Lizzie, if I left you for a few minutes to have a look at it?’

‘A look at what?’

‘The Hill; I can see it from my bedroom window, you know.’

The amazing news had been rather too much for the little widow, and she yearned for an opportunity of realising it alone. Her intense happiness had communicated itself, in

spite of herself, to Lizzie, and for the moment she forgot her trouble.

‘Did you ever see any one so delighted as dear Aunt Jane, Mr. Leyden? I wonder if so much pleasure was ever before purchased for 400*l.*? ’

‘To be exact, for 350*l.*,’ observed the antiquary.

‘But I had undertaken to pay 400*l.*, and—’

‘Yes; but that was before you knew the Hill had been offered to Bolt, the grazier, for 350*l.* I represented to Mr. Snugg that the effect of that discovery upon your mind might be very disadvantageous to him as a builder, if matters were not arranged to your satisfaction.’

‘My dear Mr. Leyden, how can I ever repay you for your great kindness and all the trouble—’

‘Hush, hush! If ever there was a case where the phrase “the trouble is a pleasure” had a literal application, it is this case; but, as a matter of fact, there is a fee attached to

my poor services. I have a little memorandum here, but I will read the other document first, to save time, at Mr. Snugg's.' With that the antiquary began to read the deed in question, not without a certain enjoyment of its quaint and old-world phraseology, from the comparatively high-and-dry land of 'This indenture witnesseth,' through the morasses of iteration, 'heirs, executors, administrators, and assigns, and every of them by these present and pursuant to and by force and virtue, and in execution of the power or powers, authority or authorities of, &c.,' into yellowest fog.

' You understand all this, I hope, my dear Miss Dart ? ' said Roger Leyden, after an exceptionally severe struggle with half a dozen extinct but jaw-breaking synonyms.

' Not one single word of it,' was the candid reply.

' That is a pity, for it has a fine old smack about it, and reminds one of black letter.'

' It looks like black letter, too. Why, in the name of common-sense, can't these things

be written so as to be read, and in language that is intelligible ?'

'That is a question you must put to the lawyers. Perhaps it would tend to make law cheap; and there is nothing so dear, so the lawyers say, as cheap law. Do you care to hear the rest of it, or shall we take it as read ?'

'We will take it as read, by all means.'

'Very good. And now there is the memorandum I have jotted down, in which you undertake, as possessor of Battle Hill, to make over to my representatives—that is, any one I choose to appoint in my place—or to me, one half of such ancient treasure as may be found there, or the value of it. It is merely a matter of form.'

'But since it is legible, and can be understood of the people,' remarked Miss Dart, pointing to the MS. in question, which her companion kept folded in his hand, 'why should I not see it? I have read in books of virtuous and trustful women signing away all their property to designing wretches, without

having the least idea that they were doing anything of the kind.'

'Well, if you must, you must,' said the antiquary, reluctantly.

'But I do not see your name in the document at all, Mr. Leyden?'

'Why, no; I have left a blank to be filled up at the last moment by my representative.'

'Heirs and assigns?' suggested Miss Dart, with the proud conscientiousness of newly acquired learning.

'Well, Mary is not exactly that, you see.'

'Mary? Do you mean Mary Melburn?'

'Well, of course I do. You don't suppose I wanted all that money for myself?' (he always spoke of the treasure as if it were in a bank instead of a hill). 'Besides, I may be dead a quarter of a century before you find it; and Matthew will be dead, poor lad, for certain. He will have what little I have to leave him—unless, indeed, I am so unfortunate as to survive him—and will therefore be my heir. That is why I said representative;

and I knew you would not be displeased to find it was Mary.'

'Of course not, my dear Mr. Leyden,' assented Lizzie, tenderly. Though she knew that it mattered absolutely nothing to any one to whom the visionary property was assigned, she was touched by the antiquary's precision in a matter which to him had all the solidity of fact. Many men have their hobbies, but they ride them for their own ends. To keep a hobby for some one else's advantage is a very rare occurrence indeed. Miss Dart appreciated it accordingly. She said, with her brightest smile, 'Let us go across to Mr. Snugg, and make sure of "our property."'

## CHAPTER XLV.

‘I HAVE DONE YOU WRONG.’

THE signing and sealing by which Elizabeth Dart was transferred into a landed proprietor was performed with as little of ‘the law’s delay’ as has probably ever entered into such a proceeding ; it was a ready-money transaction, and the vendor, as represented by Mr. Snugg, was as desirous for the completion of the contract as the vendee. In twenty minutes the antiquary and his young friend were back at the Welcome. He parted from her at the door, rightly imagining that she would prefer to receive her relative’s congratulations alone. Aunt Jane was waiting for her in the parlour, with pale face and anxious eyes.

‘There has been no hitch, my dear,’ cried Lizzie, cheerfully, in answer to her troubled

looks ; 'the Hill is ours ; kiss me, while I am still affable and not yet spoiled by my proud position of being a lady of the land.'

Aunt Jane threw herself on her neck, and burst into tears. 'I congratulate you a thousand times, my darling, and with all my heart. It ought to be the happiest day of my life, I'm sure.'

'And what *ought* to be, I beg you will understand for the future *is*,' replied Lizzie, with severity. 'When people are poor, this present sphere may not seem the best possible of worlds to them ; but remember that you and I have henceforth nothing in common with such folk. We are a prosperous couple ; and everything that is, is right. We cannot imagine what there is to complain of ; we acknowledge, with humility, that everything is in accordance with the fitness of things ; and you must allow me to add that all display of emotion is out of place in the best circles.'

'We are never out of the reach of misfortune, Lizzie, while we have friends who are within its grasp.'

‘But, for the future, we must not know unfortunate people, Aunt Jane ; we must only know carriage people—— What is the matter ? Good Heavens ! Has anything happened ?’ cried Lizzie, dropping her bantering tone, and gazing on her companion’s face with sudden alarm.

‘Mary has been here.’

‘I see ; the contrast between your pleasure and her trouble has vexed your gentle heart. So far from envying our happiness, she will share it. Did you tell her ?’

‘Oh, no ; I left that for your sweet lips, my darling ; and besides, she called here about another matter that concerns yourself. She would have waited, but that Matthew is not so well this morning ; or, perhaps, she could not bear to see your little spell of sunshine clouded. She brought this paper with her, in which there is bad news.’

‘Poor Matthew ! The “Parthenon” ! Some slating of his poems—of those which were not published in its own columns, we may be

quite sure. I wish the critics would transfer one half the praise they lavish on me to him.

They sit at home and turn an easy wheel  
That sets sharp racks at work to pinch and peel.

I do not care to read it.'

'But it is not about Matthew ; it is about Mr. Argand.'

'Great Heavens !' The colour rushed from her face, and she seized the paper with trembling hands, that contrasted strangely indeed with her former indifference. 'Where is it ? Where is it ?' she cried, impatiently.

'It is only a literary note ; but Matthew thought it of sufficient importance to send the paper on. It might, he said, be an exaggeration.'

'Read it, read it,' murmured Lizzie, hoarsely. Her eyes were blinded by fast-flowing tears.

'We are sorry to say the reports that have been floating in the air of literary circles, for some time, concerning the retirement of Mr. Argand from the management of the

“Millennium” have assumed only too much consistency. This will be a great blow to serial literature. The fact is to be regretted on all accounts, but especially if, as we understand, the misfortune is connected with financial difficulties.’

‘Is it not bad news? Such a kind good man as he is,’ interrupted Mrs. Richter. ‘What is it you want, Lizzie?’

She did not answer; she had already got the book in her hand that she was looking for. It was a ‘Bradshaw,’ which they had brought down with them. She turned over the pages of the guide with faltering fingers and that eager haste which is ‘half-sister to Delay.’ At last she found the place.

‘Aunt Jane, I am going back to town at once,’ she said decisively. ‘But that must not cut short your holiday. You can either stop here, or stay with our friends at the Look-out, who will be delighted to see you. It is impossible to say how long I may be away, but I hope not long.’

‘And do you think I could stay here en-

joying myself, while you, as I know by your dear face, are in trouble and misery ?' cried the little woman in a tone of tender remonstrance.

'Why not ?' answered the girl, bitterly. 'What have I been doing these three days, while my best friend has been drinking the cup of bitterness to the dregs ?—full of dreams of pleasure and prosperity, while he has been surrounded with the rising tide of ruin—a niggard, when I might perhaps have helped him—ungrateful and unkind, a worthless creature.' Her face was drawn and haggard, her tone vehement and remorseful ; she moved to the bell, and rang it violently. 'Can I have a fly to go to the station ?'

'I am sorry to say, ma'am,' said the maid, 'it has gone out.'

'No matter, I can walk.'

'I can walk too,' pleaded Aunt Jane.

'No, my dear, no,' said Lizzie, falling at once into her usual tone of tenderness. 'You shall follow, if you really wish it, in the afternoon ; you will do me a greater favour

by so doing than by accompanying me, welcome as your companionship always is. I must go alone ; and, just now, I cannot bear any questioning, even from the lips I love. Say to my dear friends that I have pressing business, literary business, in London. I have not a moment to lose if I would catch the express. Here is my purse—pay everything ; and when you come home to-night, you will see your Lizzie, I trust, herself again. I am so sorry, so very sorry, to cut short your little holiday, my darling.'

One swift embrace, and she was gone. Aunt Jane watched her from the window, moving quickly down the narrow street, with gaze set straight before her : a traveller with a purpose.

'If I did not know she was a genius, I should say the dear girl was daft,' murmured the little widow. 'I feel almost daft myself. Think of being left all alone in an hotel, in a private sitting-room, with a purse of gold in my hand ! I feel like somebody in a parable.'

In the meantime, Elizabeth Dart passed

on her way without looking right or left—not a glance even did she cast on Battle Hill as she went by it. The place, though it had become her own, had not only no attraction for her now, but had something repulsive about it. She had spent money on it which might have served a better purpose, and it would be difficult to realise such a property, even at a loss. It had been the foundation for schemes of pleasure and ambition which she had been weaving for herself, while the man to whom she was indebted for all she had, had been writhing in a net of embarrassment. She had not known it, indeed ; but she might have guessed it. She did not blame Mr. Argand for having withheld his confidence from her, as he had tacitly reproached *her* for doing. She set it down rightly to his unwillingness to cause her pain ; but the fact that she had received the first news of his misfortune from a paragraph in a newspaper filled her with humiliation.

She reached the railway station without the least consciousness of how she had arrived

there. She only knew she was in time to catch the train ; the journey by rail was accomplished in the same mechanical manner. On reaching town, she took a cab and drove at once to Harewood Square. It was some little comfort to her that the house wore its familiar look. If, as she reproached herself, she had hitherto not been alive sufficiently to the misfortunes that were pressing upon Felix Argand, they now loomed large enough before her mental vision, and she would hardly have been astonished had she found his home untenanted, and bills of sale in its windows. Everything, however, wore the same appearance as usual. It was with a beating heart that Elizabeth Dart waited for the servant's reply to the question whether his master was at home. It was long past the usual hour for his departure to his office, but perhaps his occupation there was already gone, and there was no need for him to leave his roof. Quite a weight seemed taken from her mind when the man replied, 'He is not at home, Miss.'

'Can I see Miss Argand?' was her next inquiry.

If she had couched the question in the same terms as before, she would doubtless have received the same reply ; it was evident by the servant's manner that he had received orders to deny his mistress to all callers ; on the other hand, he knew she was a friend of the family.

'I am not quite sure, Miss ; she is not very well,' he hesitated.

'Please to say that my business is important, and very pressing.' After some interval he returned, and ushered her into the drawing-room. It was a pleasant apartment enough as she remembered it, but in the morning it had an artificial and untimely look. Already the guests who had been wont to enliven it were wanting ; where the murmur of pleasant talk had been, and the ripple of laughter, there was silence, and to Miss Dart's foreboding spirit it seemed to have already lost its atmosphere of home. The whole house, like one over which the shadow of calamity

has fallen, was very still. Presently, a slow and unelastic step was heard upon the stairs, and Miss Argand entered. She was dressed as usual, and there was no outward sign of woe ; she had even a smile upon her face as she greeted her visitor, though it flitted away in a second, like a sunray from a mirror, leaving it cold and cheerless.

‘ You have returned to town earlier than you intended, have you not, Miss Dart ? ’ she inquired, in cold mechanical tones.

‘ Yes—oh, yes ! but not so early as I ought to have done. I ought never to have left it.’

‘ Why not ? ’

‘ Because, as I fear, you are in trouble.’

‘ Who told you that ? Not Felix ? ’ cried Miss Argand, quickly, and darting a penetrating glance at her companion.

‘ Oh no ; your brother has told me nothing —or only what the world knows.’

‘ You mean about his giving up the “ Millennium ” ? Yes, he has decided upon doing that. It will make, however, one is

pleased to know, no difference with your connection with it. I congratulate you upon the great success of "The Usher"; every one, they tell me, is talking about it. It was a great surprise to him to find you were the author.'

'Has my silence upon the subject forfeited his friendship, Miss Argand?' cried Lizzie, suddenly. 'What have I done? Great Heavens! what *have* I done to be so treated? When I was unknown and poor he was my best and kindest friend, but now—'

'Well, that is it,' interrupted Miss Argand. 'Your positions are reversed, you see. You are prosperous and will be rich, while he, my brother Felix, is penniless and ruined.'

Her first words were uttered with studious coldness, her last in a tone trembling with emotion; when she had done her face fell forward on her hand and she sobbed like a child.

Elizabeth Dart rose from her chair and fell upon her knees beside her.

'Miss Argand, dear Miss Argand, who

love and pity him so, have a little pity on me. You say when he was prosperous and I was poor that he was my friend, but that now our positions are reversed. I take you at your word : let me be his friend now ! There is nothing, nothing in the world that I would not do for him. All I have is his, and I am here to offer it ; only tell me what I can do !'

The vehemence and passion of her tone were intense, yet her voice was distinct and clear—the voice of a woman who, though she may have lost her heart, still keeps her head. Miss Argand looked at her with streaming eyes, but with an expression not so much of sorrow as of surprise and remorse.

' I have done you wrong, Miss Dart,' she murmured.

' No matter what you have done, no matter about me at all. Only tell me how I can help him. How much does he owe ? When has he got to pay it ? Will 500*l.* be of any service to him ?'

Miss Argand shook her head, and smiled sadly but very tenderly.

' You good, dear girl, but it is of no use.'

' I can get more ; I am sure I can get more ; only let me know exactly how he stands and how much he owes.'

' He owes nothing. The company in which he had put his all has been wound up. The last call has been made, and he has paid it with his last shilling. This house is sold as it stands, and there is nothing in it we can call our own. He leaves this day month for Australia ; he has accepted, I believe, some appointment in Melbourne ; but I do not trouble him with questions.'

' But the "Millennium" ? '

' The "Millennium" is his own for one more issue, then the mortgage he raised upon it for this unfortunate speculation will be foreclosed.'

' What is its amount ? '

' Two thousand pounds.'

' But the "Review" must be worth more than that. His editorship has made a great success of it.'

' Just so ; when he has resigned I am told

it will be valueless, but the mortgagee is a man of letters, Mr. Doris, whom you have met here, who wishes to undertake it himself. I think Felix might have got the money advanced to him at one time, but he is very proud, and would ask no help of any man.'

'Thank Heaven for that!' murmured Elizabeth Dart.

'You must never tell him that I told you all this,' continued Miss Argand. 'It would wound him to the quick; but not worse,' she added, with a sigh, 'than it wounds me.'

'Why should it wound you to tell me about him?'

'Because, though you cannot help him, I am sure you would do if you could, and I have never given you credit for such generosity. On the contrary, I thought—but, as you say, it is no matter what I thought. I picture to myself all day my brother and his future; with all his talents I fear he is not one to make his way in a new world; his career is closed, his ambition is quenched. He has already, Heaven help him! the look of a

broken man. He will be home to lunch with us, but you will be shocked to see him.'

'I would not see him for the world,' was Miss Dart's unexpected reply. 'That is, I mean not like that.' She rose at once as if in alarm lest he should return and find her. 'When will he not be here? when, that is, can I see you alone to-day, my dear Miss Argand?'

'Any time this evening. Felix dines out to-night with his Melbourne friend, to conclude, I understand, some final arrangements.'

'Then I will look in at eight o'clock, if you will not be very tired of me?'

'I shall not be that,' smiled Miss Argand, sadly. 'The time is coming, and very shortly, when I shall pine for the sight of an old friend in vain. But you must not hide yourself from Felix. If he knew that you were in town, it would distress him beyond measure to think you had avoided him.'

'But he must not know I am in town—until to-night, at all events. I must beg of you to keep my visit a secret.'

'As you please, my dear,' sighed Miss Argand: 'good-bye, and God bless you!' She uttered the last words with fervent earnestness, and, drawing her young companion towards her, pressed her lips to her forehead.

## CHAPTER XLVI.

## RAISING THE WIND.

MISS DART was well accustomed to make her way about town alone, but she had never felt so lonely as when she left Mr. Argand's door. A companion, indeed, in the sense of a protector, she did not need. Even Aunt Jane would, just now, have been superfluous, and in her way ; but she stood in the utmost need of an adviser ; and the only man who could have helped her in her difficulties was the last to whom she could apply. Nevertheless, she was not without a scheme, which she had thought out for herself in the railway train ; and she put it into practice at once. In the first place, she called in the New-road to advise the landlady of her aunt's expected return, and also to fetch certain papers of her own, which she put away in a little hand-bag ;

and then she took a hansom to Paternoster-row.

She had visited it not many days before, and upon a similar errand ; but to-day her business was far more pressing and important. She endeavoured to picture to herself in what state she would return an hour or two hence. Would success or failure have resulted from her efforts ? Even if the latter should happen, there would still be a hope, though a very slender one, of obtaining her desire. The consciousness of its existence, however—the knowledge that there was yet a second line of defence behind her should the first prove useless—supported her wonderfully. She was naturally of a sanguine disposition, and her experience of life had strengthened it. Those who have known trouble and disappointment are not so easily depressed as those who find themselves for the first time face to face with extremity.

It seemed to her of good augury, to begin with, that Mr. Rose, whom she proposed to visit, was at home. If he had been out of town, as, considering the season, he well might

have been, half her hopes would have been cut off at once ; for the success of her mission was, she felt, dependent upon the promptness of its issue. A week—perhaps a day—hence, his help, even if she attained it, might be valueless.

Mr. Rose was not among the princes of the publishing trade ; but still less did he belong to its pettifoggers. He had not been long enough established to be held in the first rank of the Row ; but he had a long head, a long purse, and plenty of pluck. If he was not acknowledged by the great houses as a rival, they had cause to regret his existence. He was not very particular about the courtesies of ‘the trade,’ and on two or three occasions had lured a popular author from his literary proprietor by the jingling of his guineas. But he had never yet discovered a writer of any standing for himself till he made that offer of a thousand pounds to the unknown author of ‘*The Usher*.’

He had also, as we know, published Matthew Meyrick’s poems. The former of

these operations had been speculative. His opinion of the novel was very high, and he believed, in time, he should see his money back. The latter had arisen from no hope of gain. He had brought out the poems because they were good poems, and would reflect credit upon him as a publisher. He was no money-grubber, though he liked to make money ; he resented being reckoned with the rank and file of his calling, and aspired to be one of the Rulers of the Row. Still, he had not been born in its purple, and had some ways that were by no means Royal ways. He was not quite a gentleman, although he had very narrowly missed being one. His appearance was in his favour. Though of small stature, he had a leonine head and handsome features ; his hair was grey, and his face almost colourless ; but his black eyes were so large and brilliant, that their searching glance, turned upon an author who had received advances without advancing with his MS., reminded him of the dark-lantern of a policeman.

‘To see you again so soon is, indeed, an unexpected pleasure, Miss Dart,’ he said, as she was ushered into his sanctum ; but those who knew him best would have gathered that his feelings were not quite so cordial as his words. He had by no means lost faith in his newly discovered genius, and was far from repenting of his bargain with her ; but it promised to be a less profitable one—thanks to Mr. Argand’s hint, ‘If I were the author of “The Usher,” I would sell it for five years, and not for perpetuity’—than he had proposed to himself. When he first set eyes upon her, it seemed to him that she was a client after his own heart ; and he was surprised, and not a little disappointed, to find her such a stickler for her rights. It was ‘not pretty of her,’ or what her youth and inexperience had led him to expect, and it had put him out in his calculations ; still, he had no mistrust of his own judgment. He had read the whole novel, and what he had heard of it upon all sides had strengthened his opinion of its exceptional merit. He was perfectly satisfied with his

bargain ; what he feared from Miss Dart's re-appearance was that she was not satisfied, and had come to ask for more money. Of course, there was no need to give it. The arrangement had been ratified and was legally binding ; but he was very disinclined to quarrel with a writer who, to use a significant expression peculiar to 'the Row,' had evidently a good deal of meat on her bones. It may be thought that it was not very chivalrous of Mr. Rose to believe his fair client capable of putting pressure upon him in such a matter, and so soon ; but his experience of female authors was that they were not much swayed by delicate scruples in these arrangements, and that within twelve hours of the conclusion of a literary bargain they always regretted it, and thought they ought to have got better terms. Advisers are rarely wanting to them who believe in their transcendent genius to any extent (short of investing in it), and in the universal peccability of publishers.

The first words of his visitor were very far from removing his apprehensions upon this

point, though they were uttered in a very gentle and modest voice, and not at all in that tone of grievance, or of even righteous indignation, in which such applications were usually made.

‘I am come to you upon a matter which to me is of very great importance, Mr. Rose. I wish, if possible, to obtain a very considerable sum of money at once?’

Mr. Rose smiled and raised his eyebrows. ‘It is not an uncommon case, my dear madam,’ he replied, drily. ‘Everybody wants money, and most of us immediately. In fact, it has been observed that there is no one upon the earth’s surface, however wealthy, to whom a thousand pounds wouldn’t be acceptable, and that even the richest people are often hard up for ready money.’

‘I am even more greedy than the millionaire of whom you speak,’ was Miss Dart’s quiet reply, ‘for I want two thousand pounds in bank-notes.’

‘Really!’ It was only a word, but it seemed weighted with the stolid indifference

of a whole tribe of North American Indians. The speaker looked wistfully at the unfinished letter, which he had pushed away from him on the desk at her entrance into the room, and then at the clock that stood upon his mantelpiece. ‘These aspirations,’ his face seemed to say, ‘would be interesting, if I had time to consider them, on account of their abnormal size ; but my time is valuable, and they have no personal relation to myself.’

‘If you cannot help me yourself, Mr. Rose,’ continued Miss Dart, with a tinge of colour in her anxious face, ‘you will not at least, I hope, refuse me the benefit of your advice, under circumstances which you will understand as well as any man, and infinitely better than any one else to whom I could apply. I have another novel here’—she produced a large manuscript from her bag—‘not, indeed, written, but sketched in skeleton fashion from beginning to end. I believe it in many ways to be superior to “The Usher” ; it is, at all events, the result of a larger experience. I will not take up your time with

it, if you think that its realisation of the sum I mention is out of the question, as far as you are concerned. I could leave it with you for two hours, but not more, as, in case of refusal, it would be but so much lost time ; and it is absolutely necessary for me to procure the money before the banks close.'

Mr. Rose—who had pricked up his ears, 'like a horse that hears the corn-bin open,' at the words 'another novel'—laid them down again at this reference to the bank. He shook his head, and observed, curtly, 'It is quite out of the question, Miss Dart ; I have gone to the end of my tether with you already.'

'Very good : it is kind of you, at least, not to delude me with false hopes. Please to consider yourself no longer as the possible publisher of the novel, but as my friend and adviser as to its disposal. Here are three letters I received yesterday. This one is from Messrs. Blank and Asterisk, your next-door neighbours.'

Mr. Rose took the letter, with a smile that was intended to express a polite interest ; but

its effect was grim. Messrs. Blank and Asterisk were his neighbours—even as Miss Dart had said, his next neighbours—but he could scarcely be said to love them as himself. He had lately had a dispute with them over the body of an author—a question of certain copyrights he had left behind him—and they had worsted him. He did not like that expression ‘unhappily’ in their communication: ‘Unhappily, “The Usher” has been disposed of.’ They knew it was disposed of well enough, and to him; and it was great impertinence of them to use that word. Still less did he like the phrase, ‘on still more favourable terms.’ It was a vague but no less nefarious attempt to decoy his author away from him—to rob him of his one laurel, his first genius.

‘If Messrs. Blank and Asterisk will sign you two thousand pounds for that—that skeleton’—he exclaimed, bitterly, ‘I should certainly recommend you to accept their offer.’

‘And you will even go the length of

wishing them joy of their bargain,' said Miss Dart, smiling.

'Well, I did not say so; but if I must say the honest truth, I think it would be a ridiculously lavish offer.'

'No doubt, as the matter stands; but here are two applications for the same work —one from a magazine, the other from a syndicate of newspapers, which may require the serial rights. Now, would not Messrs. Blank and Asterisk take one of these offers into account, and, by the purchase of all rights at once, recoup themselves for a portion of their outlay?'

'No doubt they would, if only the novel were finished; though, even in that case, it would show considerably more spirit than they are generally credited with. The fact is, my dear young lady,' added Mr. Rose, in gentler tones, 'there is a risk in the matter which one has a delicacy in mentioning to you; but, though your novel may be a masterpiece, when you have clothed your

skeleton, as you call it, it may never be clothed at all.'

'You mean that I may die in the meantime.'

Mr. Rose nodded. 'Such accidents do happen, even to the healthiest and youngest of us. The works of our great authors live for ever,' here he bowed, perhaps to point a complimentary allusion to 'The Usher'; 'but the authors themselves inherit the common lot. Now, where should I be, financially speaking, my dear Madam, if I gave 2,000*l.* for these dry bones, and anything should happen to you before you breathed life into them?'

'You are left out of the question altogether, you know,' observed Miss Dart, quietly; 'we were talking of Messrs. Blank and Asterisk. Now, what I thought of proposing to them was to insure my life for this money, and to place the policy in their hands till I gave them the complete MS. in exchange for it.'

'An uncommonly good idea, Miss Dart,'

exclaimed Mr. Rose, approvingly. ‘ Make over “The Usher” in perpetuity, instead of giving only a five-years right in it, and the sum you require for your next book shall be yours.’

‘ But Messrs. Blank and Asterisk have not got “The Usher,”’ returned Miss Dart, with an innocent air.

‘ Neither have they got two thousand pounds at call on their banker’s hands,’ replied Mr. Rose, audaciously. ‘ Now, I should just give you a cheque for the money, and you could get it changed in Fleet-street in five minutes. Only think, too, what a disadvantage it would be for you to be offering your wares from publisher to publisher instead of sticking to a respectable house like mine, which you have been connected with from the first. There is nothing, to my mind, more unpleasant—as a matter of feeling—than disloyalty of this kind. If you’ll allow me, I’ll just get down the heads of our little agreement for your signature.’

‘ There must be nothing about “The

Usher" in it, Mr. Rose,' said Miss Dart, decisively. 'The advice that was given me with respect to the disposal of that novel, I am bound to respect; but as to this other, I will sign anything you please.'

For the next ten minutes Mr. Rose said nothing, but employed with diligence a practised pen. Then he suddenly turned round with, 'After all, by Jove! there is a risk. I take for granted that you will insure your life as soon as the thing can be done; but suppose anything should happen to you before?'

'I'll be very careful,' said Miss Dart, humbly. 'I'll look on both sides of the crossings.'

'Crossings! you must not put your foot to the ground.'

'Very good; and I will always choose the safest of patent safety hansoms.'

'Heavens! you must not dream of getting into a hansom; you must always take a four-wheeled cab.'

‘It is very hot weather for four-wheelers ; but you shall be obeyed, Mr. Rose.’

‘And there is one thing, though it’s scarcely worth while to mention it, there must be no longer any concealment of your real name.’

‘Oh ! Mr. Rose, I had so much rather not,’ pleaded Miss Dart.

‘You have promised me you will agree to anything I please in this matter,’ he answered, coldly, ‘and that is one of my stipulations. The mystery that has hitherto been maintained about you has been very useful ; but the time has now come for putting an end to it. When the world hears that the author of “The Usher” and of those admirable essays is a lady, it will have something to talk about, or I’m much mistaken.’

‘But I don’t want to be talked about, Mr. Rose.’

‘That is only because you don’t know what’s good for you. To be talked about, in the case of an author, is to be read ; to be read, is to be bought ; and to be bought,’

concluded the publisher, with the air of one in search of a climax, 'well—to be bought, is the laurel crown of literature.'

' Yet Milton's "Paradise Lost" was sold, it is said, for fifteen pounds,' said Miss Dart, smiling.

' And a deuced lucky fellow he was to get it. I should like to see Messrs. Blank and Asterisk giving fifteen pounds for "Paradise Lost," or even bringing it out at half profits. There's your cheque, Miss Dart, I will get it changed at the bank for you myself, and then see you safely into your cab, for both our sakes.'

## CHAPTER XLVII.

## AN EXPLANATION.

MR. ROSE, to do him justice, whether a matter was great or small, was always as good as his word. He accompanied Miss Dart to the bank, and drew for her forty notes of fifty each—an ‘operation’ which would otherwise have embarrassed her not a little. On the way thither he talked of other things, and among them of the impending change in the ‘Millennium’ announced by the ‘Parthenon.’

‘Why Mr. Argand should have given it up,’ he said, ‘passes my comprehension.’

‘But I am afraid—at least, so the paper said,’ put in Miss Dart, hastily, ‘it is not a question of choice.’

‘He parts with the proprietorship, no doubt, upon compulsion,’ observed Mr. Rose,

‘and precious hard up he must be to do it, considering it is his own offspring, and such a promising child ; but whoever has bought it is, in my opinion, a fool not to have secured Argand’s services as editor, at any price. It is like buying a racehorse without securing the only jockey who can ride him.’

Unpleasant as was the conversation to Miss Dart, she did not shrink from pursuing it. It struck her that from one so sagacious and conversant with affairs as her companion she might learn something that might be of advantage to Mr. Argand.

‘The gentleman who has bought it——’ she began.

‘Bought it?’ broke in the publisher, with eager interest. ‘Then, it is absolutely disposed of, is it?’

‘Well, no ;’ she hesitated, for she felt that she had no right to speak of the mortgage, ‘it has not actually changed hands.’

‘Now, look here, Miss Dart, we have done some business together which has been

mutually satisfactory, I hope ; now, perhaps, you can do me a good turn. Mr. Argand, as everybody knows, is uncommonly sweet upon you—I mean, of course, as an authoress,' he hastily added, for poor Miss Dart had turned scarlet. 'Any word from you will have his ear. Just you tell him that there is a person of your acquaintance who will give him, if he will still continue to edit it—upon terms, of course, to be agreed upon—a good round sum for the "Millennium."'

'How much?' inquired Miss Dart, meekly.

'Well, upon my word, young lady, that's coming to the point indeed. I can't say the sum without looking into the books ; but I'll give him four years' purchase for it. Only, that must buy *him*, too. If he's a wise man, and things are as bad as they are said to be with him, he'll just go through the Bankruptcy Court, and start again as fresh as a two-year-old.'

Here they reached the bank, where Mr. Rose transferred the sum agreed upon to Miss Dart, with many injunctions as to its

safe custody. As he helped her into the cab he noticed that her limbs trembled.

‘ You must not be nervous,’ he whispered slyly, ‘ you are not like a railway truck, ticketed with the amount you carry. Besides, it is I who ought to be nervous. Be very, very careful of your precious life, for if anything should happen to you I should never forgive myself.’

As Mr. Rose took off his hat with an encouraging smile, Miss Dart felt that she was parting from a friend ; if he was somewhat too wise in his generation to be numbered among the children of light, he had nevertheless something in common with them.

Lizzie drove straight home to the New Road to deposit her treasure in safety, and there, not a little to her relief, she found Aunt Jane. The sense of responsibility while action lay before her, she could bear ; but now all was done that could be done, and, as she hoped, for the best, she felt the burden of it almost too much for her strength. With

another, it is true, it could not be shared; but the consciousness of having a friend with her, and not being absolutely alone in that time of trouble and uncertainty, relieved her wonderfully.

‘How good of you it was to come by so early a train!’ she exclaimed, as she embraced the little widow. ‘I thought it was arranged that you were to wait for the afternoon express?’

‘How could I wait, my darling,’ was the affectionate reply, ‘when it was possible to meet you earlier? You may be sure it was no pleasure to me to stay at Casterton with the knowledge that you were alone—and—and in trouble, in London.’

‘But you wished good-bye to our dear friends at the Look-out, and explained to them why it was absolutely necessary I should have come away?’

‘I did my best, my dear,’ returned the widow, simply; ‘but I am not good at explanation, and especially when I don’t understand the thing myself. Mary, however, is

so clever, that that didn't signify. She comprehended the whole matter at once, and said she would have done just the same had she been in your place.'

Here Aunt Jane stole a half-frightened look at her niece, who, however, was looking out of the window, with a thoughtful and preoccupied face. 'Dear Mary!' in tenderest accents, was all that she murmured in reply. Presently she inquired, after a long silence, 'Did you tell them about Battle Hill?'

'I did not mean to do so; but Mr. Leyden came in, and took it for granted that they knew it. If you had only seen their delight at the news, my darling! I do not believe, if the place had become their own, that it could have given them greater pleasure.'

'Alas, Aunt Jane, I have bad news for them, and for you! It must be years before we go to live at Casterton, if we ever do at all. I am so very, very sorry to have raised your hopes only to destroy them.'

'It is of no sort of consequence, my darling, so far as I am concerned; if we are

content, we are happy ; and I am always content with you—not, of course,' added Aunt Jane, hastily, 'that I am so foolish or so selfish as to imagine that I can always be with you.'

'There is only one thing that shall ever part us,' said Lizzie, quietly, 'and that is death.'

'You must not say that—you must not say that!' put in Aunt Jane, with a little sob. 'When I said I am content to be with you, I should have added that I should also be content, wherever I was, if I were assured you were happy.'

'You dear old thing!' whispered Lizzie, caressing her. 'It is just like you to say so ; but it is also, I hope, like me to be as good as my word.'

Aunt and niece sat together at the open window—for the afternoon was extremely hot—exchanging only now and then a word with one another, but each busy with her own thoughts, until it was dinner time.

'I am going out this evening for an hour

or so,' said Lizzie; 'but I shall not be far off.'

Aunt Jane understood at once that she was going to Harewood Square; doubtless, too, she guessed that she had already been there; but not a single question did she put upon the matter. She had not many gifts, but she had that golden one of silence, which, in some circumstances, outweighs all others.

She did not even offer her escort when Lizzie rose to put on her bonnet, though her eyes anxiously watched the cab along the street, until it disappeared at the turning into the square.

Miss Argand was at home and alone, as she had promised to be; and though her face was weary and sad, it brightened up a little at the sight of her visitor.

'Let us come into the back drawing-room,' she said, 'it is cooler there.' It was also darker, and there were traces of recent tears upon the poor lady's cheeks, which she was unwilling should be seen. The heat had

increased ; every door and window in the two rooms was open ; there was hardly a breath of air.

‘ I think we shall have thunder, presently,’ she said, wearily ; though, in truth, she cared nothing whether it thundered or not.

‘ Has anything happened since I saw you, my dear Miss Argand? Any change, I mean, in your brother’s affairs?’

‘ None whatever, dear ; we are only a little nearer the edge of the precipice, that is all. What makes me so wretched is that I cannot convince Felix that this trouble affects me on his account, and hardly on my own at all. He reproaches himself with having ruined me ; whereas I had nothing to lose. It is his own little fortune that has gone, which he had a perfect right to spend in any way he chose, only the way he chose has been so unlucky.’

‘ Supposing the mortgage of 2,000*l.* on the “Millennium” to be paid off, he would still, as I understand, have *that* in his possession, would he not?’

‘I suppose so. But what is the good of supposing, my dear?’

‘Still, there is no harm in it,’ said Lizzie, smiling. ‘Even Euclid, who is not an imaginative writer, admits that much: “Let it be granted,” he says.’

‘Miss Dart, dear Miss Dart,’ interrupted Miss Argand, with agitation, ‘you would never play with my feelings, I know. You have some good news for us.’

‘I have got 2,000*l.*, at all events,’ and with that she produced a little parcel from her hand-bag and laid it on the table.

‘Great heavens! what a wretch I have been,’ said Miss Argand, bitterly. ‘I am a very wicked woman!’

Lizzie stared, as well she might.

‘Go on, my dear, don’t mind what I am saying. Who has obtained this money, and under what conditions? Everything will depend on that.’

‘There are no conditions. It is my own money: now it is your brother’s,’ and she pushed the parcel to her across the table.

*‘Your money!’* cried Miss Argand. ‘Alas! then it is of no use; he will never, never take it. And it is I, fool that I am, who have prevented it. Listen to me, you dear good girl, and forgive me, if you can.’

Nevertheless, for a moment or two she did not speak; but, like one who is contending with acute physical pain, pressed her open hands against her face, and rocked herself to and fro.

‘Felix and I have lived together all our lives,’ she began. ‘At first, when we were both left orphans, and he was very young, I believe I did my best as an elder sister by him. I would have done more, if I could, for he was and is dearer to me than all the world beside; what I did do was not much—yet he has never forgotten it. After a few years, our positions became reversed; and since then he has been my protector and the provider of all my needs. My influence over him has, however, never ceased. If I had exerted it wisely, he would this day be the happiest of men;

but my selfishness and want of sympathy have ruined him.'

'You do yourself wrong, Miss Argand,' said Lizzie, in grave but tender tones. 'Whatever may have been wanting in you, it was not want of sympathy ; and whatever mistake you may have committed, it was, as you thought, for his benefit.'

Miss Argand shook her head. 'No, dear ; I had sympathy with his work, sympathy even with his ambition ; but where the true happiness of his heart was concerned, I had none ; his dearest wishes were counter to my own, and, therefore, I opposed them. I tried to persuade myself that I was acting for his good, I know now that I was doing it for my own gratification ; my motive was not love, but jealousy.'

Here the thunder began to peal, though from a cloudless sky, and the speaker paused, as though to listen to it. The two women sat together for a little in silence, each looking before her thoughtfully, but with eyes averted from the other. There was no occasion for

either to read the other's face ; for the very thought of her companion's heart was known to her.

' When he first spoke to me of your writings, Lizzie,' continued Miss Argand, ' I felt almost as interested in you as he did himself ; I had a genuine admiration for your genius ; I looked forward with pleasure to carrying out his wish that I should be of friendly service to you. Until I saw you, I forgot now what sort of a picture I had made of you in my mind ; but it was something very unlike yourself. When I beheld you, young and beautiful, and called to mind the terms in which my brother had spoken of the qualities of your mind, I feared, and justly, the effect you would produce upon him. I called upon you with the kindest intentions, and you did nothing to alter them, yet when I left your presence it was as a rival and as an enemy. I even persuaded myself that you were an adventuress, from whose charms it behoved me to guard my brother by all means in my power. You may have noticed,

perhaps, how coldly I received you ; how rarely I invited you to our house ; and how few were the opportunities I gave you of being alone with Felix. In the end, I should have failed, of course ; but if I had assisted him, as I should have done from the beginning, all would yet have gone well.' Lizzie was about to speak, but her companion stopped her. 'I want no confession from your lips, my dear ; nothing that you could say could alter my convictions as to the feelings you entertained for Felix. The eyes of Jealousy are even keener than those of Love ; and it is for me to confess, and not for you. I say that in those early days, but for my secret opposition and selfish conduct, two hearts would have been made happy ; and all that I could do to hinder it would have been useless long before this, but for the change that took place in my brother's means. It may seem incredible to you, but at first our common misfortune was welcome to me—because, from what I knew of him, I knew it would prevent him

declaring his love. Thanks to me, while he was prosperous he delayed to do so ; and now that he is in adversity his lips are sealed for ever. Even if you had been twice as poor as once you were, he would not ask you to share his ruin ; but, being prosperous and famous, and with a fortune before you, it is out of the question that he should think of you otherwise than as something beyond his reach, and lost to him for ever. It is I that have done it ! It is I that have wrecked his life ! Oh ! Lizzie, Lizzie, forgive me !'

' I have nothing to forgive, Miss Argand,' said Lizzie, gently. ' I do not wonder that you were unwilling that Felix Argand should throw himself away upon a girl like me.'

' Like you ? There is none like you ! I know it now, too late, too late ! He will never take that money from your hands, never, never !'

' It is in my hands no longer,' was the quiet reply. ' Nor need he know that it has ever been in them. Hush ! I heard the front door close.'

‘No. It was the thunder. Felix will not be home for hours. He comes home late. He walks about the streets to tire himself out, to get the sleep that anxiety denies him. From whom could we persuade him that this money comes, unless from you? Who is there but yourself who would be so generous?’

‘There is no generosity about it. There are many persons—Mr. Rose, the publisher, for one—who would advance the sum, and more, upon the security of the “Millennium,” if only Mr. Argand would consent to remain its editor. He has been too hasty in this matter, and too hopeless, and too doubtful of his great gifts and reputation.’

‘I believe that is true,’ murmured the other.

‘Let him take it, then, from Mr. Rose, if he is too proud to take it from me. There will be no obligation on his side, you may assure him ; it is only I who will be the loser. I had promised myself a great pleasure ; but that is over’ (her voice broke down). ‘I think I will go home.’

She rose, but paused, with a frightened look on her face ; and, following the direction of her eyes, Miss Argand beheld a form standing in the doorway between the two rooms.

‘It is Felix !’ she cried out.

‘Yes, it is I,’ he answered, in a hoarse voice. ‘I did not know that any one was here; I have heard something that was not meant for my ears. Miss Dart——’

‘Call her Lizzie ! Call her Lizzie ! She loves you, Felix !’ exclaimed Miss Argand, wildly.

It mattered not what he called her ; for Lizzie, overcome with emotion, and fatigue, and terror, had fallen forward in a dead faint, and he had but just time to catch her in his arms.

## CHAPTER XLVIII.

## TELLING THE NEWS.

WHATEVER cause Miss Argand had to reproach herself for what she had done of *malice prepense* in separating two fond hearts, she had, in the impulse of the moment, made amends for it. When a gentleman has been informed that the object of his affection loves him, and finds her in his arms, all explanation becomes mere surplusage. The fact of her being in a dead faint by no means detracts from the satisfactoriness of the situation. He lingers (in a manner that would never be permitted at sea) over the operation of 'bringing her to,' and the less adroit he is at it, the more cause he has to congratulate himself. When she comes to herself, he is pretty confident that she will come to *him*; and so, in

fact, it turned out in the present case. When the next flash of lightning searched the room in its swift but comprehensive fashion, it found the editor and his contributor sitting hand-in-hand alone together—Miss Argand having very judiciously withdrawn herself directly there was no further need of her services—in the apparent enjoyment of an entire mutual understanding. Nevertheless, there were certain details to be inquired into. What was that great pleasure, for example, Felix had accidentally heard his Lizzie say that she had promised herself, but which was denied to her, as it appeared, through some fault of his? And what was he to take from Mr. Rose which he was too proud to take from her?

‘It was only a little parcel, which Miss Argand had got in her possession,’ she replied.

‘Some MS., I suppose,’ he said, not indifferently—very far from indifferently—but without the slightest interest in the question; he had put it, in fact, only with the object of hearing her talk, as we give sugar to a canary to make it sing.

‘Not MS.,’ she said, ‘print—or rather, engravings.’

‘A little present,’ he murmured, ‘no doubt, to smooth the way. I have just found a communication from Mr. Rose upon my study table which may have a considerable influence upon my unhappy fortunes, and which, indeed, has emboldened me to declare what, however great had been the temptation, it would otherwise have behoved me to conceal. Dear Lizzie, I am no longer a penniless man, and have even a prospect before me, such as I had not an hour ago, of at least a competent income. Mr. Rose has offered to purchase the “Millennium” on very liberal terms, and to retain me as its editor at a handsome salary.’

‘He has lost no time in that little transaction,’ thought Lizzie to herself, with a secret smile; but what she said was, ‘That is very nice.’

‘Even as matters stand, however, and though I were less unworthy of you in all other ways, I am a very, very bad match for you, my dear girl.’

‘Indeed!’ remarked Lizzie, and never was that lukewarm word more charmingly expressed; it was a really exquisite combination of interest and scepticism, and seemed to invite any amount of information of the same amazing and incredible nature.

‘Still,’ continued Mr. Argand, modestly, ‘I am not the pauper I thought I was; or, I should rather say, that as a literary commodity (though infinitely less valuable than a popular author like Mr. John Javelin) I fetch more in the market than I ever ventured to suspect.’

‘You are placed, in fact, in the same position as you were before, except that you have exchanged mortgagees?’

‘Well, not exactly, my darling,’ sighed Mr. Argand; ‘you don’t quite understand the matter.’

‘I think I do, sir. The idea of you contradicting me at such a very early stage as this!’

‘Indeed, my dear Lizzie, I only wish you were right; but the fact is, I shall exchange,

not mortgagees, but the position of a proprietor for that of an editor. My poor “Millennium” will pass out of my possession, though not out of my hands, for good and all.’

‘But if you were to pay off the present mortgage, would not that be better than selling?’

‘Why, of course, it would ; only unfortunately I have not got the money. To be sure, I might have borrowed it, but I have been so troubled and worried by other things that I did not think of that plan in time.’

‘If you could, however, effect such an arrangement with any one, you would—supposing the “Millennium” kept its value—be under no obligation to him?’

‘None whatever, since I should, of course, pay a good rate of interest for the advance.’

‘Very good ; then behold your new mortgagee. Here is the money with which to pay off the old one.’

‘The money! You must be mad, Lizzie. I am a little out of my mind myself; but then I have something to be mad about : there is

nothing to set *your* fine brain in a ferment with happiness. That you are a fortune to me I am well convinced ; you may be even worth a great deal to the publishers ; but that even "The Usher" should have produced you 2,000*l.* I must really decline to believe.'

'It seems to me that you are very rude, Felix ; and again I say it is very early to be rude,' said Lizzie, with the most delicious little pout. 'What right have you to underestimate the worth of my novel, Sir ? When you thought it was somebody else's you praised it enough ; but that was because you had got it for your own magazine, I suppose.'

'Oh, dear, dear ! here is a Termagant !'

'And there is a sceptic. I don't believe your name is Felix : I believe it's Thomas. Perhaps you will open that parcel and count those notes.'

'Oh, Lizzie ! is it really true ? What pains and trouble have you not undergone for my sake ! You must have moved heaven and earth to get all this money.'

‘I did move a publisher,’ admitted Lizzie, ruefully. ‘However, there it is.’

‘And do you really suppose that I am going to take it?’

‘That depends upon whether you are going to take *me*—which I understood was your intention. If not, and you leave me to wear the willow, then, even as a deserted mortgagee, I have your own word for it that I shall put you under no obligation.’

‘What have I done to deserve such a woman as this?’ murmured Felix Argand.

‘Heaps of misdemeanours. In the first place, you lost your temper because I did not choose you to know that I had written a novel.’

‘Lizzie, I see it all now ; you concealed its authorship in order—since you had heard that I was in difficulties—to let the “Millennium” have it at a cheap rate. You are certainly the most self-sacrificing of mortals.’

‘That is not Mr. Rose’s view of my character, I do assure you.’

‘Never mind Mr. Rose just now, my pet,

my darling!' murmured Felix, caressingly. 'How shall I find a name endearing enough, and which has not been spoilt by ignoble use, by which to call you?'

'Call me your mortgagee,' suggested Lizzie, laughing. 'That will have the merit both of truth and originality. I don't suppose any one ever fell in love with his mortgagee before. Seriously, my dear Felix, I shall not feel free to be happy with you till you have got rid of all your embarrassments.'

'I don't care twopence for my embarrassments,' said Felix, snapping his fingers. The observation was philosophic enough ; but the speaker had anything but the appearance of a philosopher. He looked so bright and gay that he might have been the editor of 'Punch' rather than of the 'Millennium.' He had suddenly grown ten years younger.

'It is fortunate that one of us, at least, has a turn for practical matters,' remarked Lizzie, with great gravity.

'But not when we are alone together for the first time, like this,' pleaded her lover, tenderly.

‘It would only be charitable to remember that your sister is also alone,’ observed Lizzie—not, however, immediately; there was an ‘interval allowed for refreshment.’ ‘I should never forgive myself if I caused you to neglect her.’

‘You will never cause me to do anything but what is kind and affectionate,’ murmured Felix, more tenderly than ever.

‘Yes; but I don’t mean what is affectionate to *me*, Sir—— How terribly it thunders! ’

‘I hear only your sweet voice. Joanna likes nothing so much as listening to thunder—quite alone.’

By way of comment to this audacious speech, there was here a most demonstrative rattle at the outer door, followed by a warning cough, a rustling of silk, and then the appearance of Miss Argand herself. ‘I am very sorry,’ said she, ‘to interrupt any conversation upon private business—but the fact is, I dare not stay by myself any longer. I thought that last clap would have split the house! ’

‘What *does* it signify?’ exclaimed Felix, peevishly. ‘We have only got it for five weeks more.’

‘He is quite irrational, and not all accountable for what he says, Miss Argand,’ explained Lizzie, apologetically.

‘And I don’t at all wonder at it; only, you must never again call me Miss Argand, my dear.’ She held out her arms, and Lizzie flew into them. ‘Has he forgiven me, my darling, as you have?’ she whispered.

‘He has no remembrance of anything but your love and devotion to him,’ was the confident reply.

The tears came into Joanna’s eyes.

‘Felix, dear Felix, I congratulate you with all my heart!’

The brother and sister embraced tenderly, and then—— ‘What are you about, Felix?’ remonstrated Joanna. ‘You have no right to be congratulating *her*.’

‘Yes, I have—on having found a sister,’ explained Felix.

‘He may be irrational, but he retains his

presence of mind,' remarked Joanna, amid great laughter.

It is probable that three such happy people were not to be found that night in District W.

By some mistake—which, as it turned out, was a fortunate one—the gentleman from Melbourne had not kept his appointment ; so that Mr. Argand had entered into no compact with him. The happy pair talked of their future, which circumstances had so brightly altered ; and the hours vanished on golden wings. Suddenly, Lizzie started up with a remorseful cry. ‘I have quite forgotten dear Aunt Jane !’ she exclaimed. ‘How frightened she will be at my being so late !’

They tried to comfort her, though not to stop her ; for it was evident that she was much distressed. ‘If I have given her a moment’s pain,’ she cried, ‘I am the wickedest of women !’

‘But it’s wicked of you to want to leave me !’ urged the enamoured one.

‘Lizzie is quite right,’ said Joanna. ‘She will not make the worse wife to you, Felix,

because, even when you are by her side, she thinks of one to whom she owes both love and duty.'

'Nor will he make the worse husband, Joanna, because he does, and will always do, the like,' said Lizzie, quickly.

'That was very prettily said, my dear ; but how sharp you are already at defending him ! I thought you had cut my nose off. Now, I shouldn't wonder if Felix saw you home.'

Felix did see her home. As she had expected, the lights showed through the windows of the sitting-room—a proof that her aunt was keeping vigil for her. 'Will you not come up, Felix ?' she said, hesitatingly, as they stood at the door. He did not think it necessary to reply in words. She led the way, a few steps before him, lest Aunt Jane, unexpectant of callers, should have laid aside her cap, without which mortal man had not beheld her for twenty years.

'I hope I have not frightened you, Aunt Jane, by being so late ?'

‘Not the least in the world,’ returned that lady, with a quiet smile.

‘You will be surprised to hear that I have brought you a gentleman visitor.’

‘I am not at all surprised, my dear,’ was the unexpected rejoinder. And the next moment Mr. Argand and the little widow were shaking hands together as though they would shake each other’s arms off. Independently of the tears that stood in her kind eyes, it was easy to see that she thoroughly comprehended the whole situation.

‘And how did you ever come to guess our secret?’ asked Lizzie, after her aunt had tenderly embraced and congratulated her.

‘I did not guess it, my dear. I am too old and too stupid; but a little bird informed me of it this morning.’

‘But we didn’t know it ourselves until this evening.’

‘Yes, you did; only you hadn’t told it to one another. When that horrid paragraph in the “Parthenon” made you jump up and run off to the railway—for she walked every step of

the way, Mr. Argand—I said to myself, this is friendship indeed! But when I told Mary what had happened, she had a much better explanation to offer. She is in love herself, you see—though, poor dear, she will never wear the orange-flower—and jumped at once to the right conclusion. “ You may be quite certain,” she said, “ that Lizzie is in love with Mr. Argand ” ; while as to Mr. Argand being in love with you, Lizzie,’ added Aunt Jane, naïvely, ‘ why, how could it be otherwise? ’

‘ A very just observation,’ observed Felix, gravely.

‘ Well, under the circumstances, my dear, I made up my mind not to expect you home to-night before I saw you ; and when I did see you it did not astonish me to find who was your companion.’

‘ You are like the dear old travelling dervish that sums up the corroborative evidence in the Eastern tales, to prove that the lost camel has only one eye,’ said Lizzie, laughing ; ‘ and you must be as tired, too, with your unac-

customed journey and your troubles about my poor self, as any dervish.'

Felix took the hint at once, and (after certain familiar formalities) his leave.

'He is a good kind man, Lizzie,' was Aunt Jane's comment upon him, 'and as worthy of you as any man is likely to be. Now, tell me, my darling, all about it.'

There were reasons that made this a difficult task, for Lizzie, of course, wished to conceal that she had made any sacrifice for Mr. Argand. But, considering what Aunt Jane had been to her, and also that she had already had cause to complain of being denied her confidence, she felt compelled to narrate the whole transaction with Mr. Rose. She had her reward, for the good widow, while warmly appreciating its revelation, did not understand one word of the matter.

'I am very stupid, I know, my dear ; but though I see what an excellent arrangement has been made for every one, I don't comprehend how you have managed to change

paper, which is not bank notes, and which has not even been written upon, into gold !'

' Well, in a word, my dear, I've mortgaged myself. It sounds like an accident, doesn't it? But, I assure you, it's a most satisfactory arrangement.'

' You dear, clever creature! That I'm sure it is, or you would never have made it.'

## CHAPTER XLIX.

## AT THE DUCHESS'S.

BEFORE the week was over, Lizzie had insured her life, and the policy was lodged in Mr. Rose's hands, without any one belonging to her suspecting anything of the matter.

She knew that Aunt Jane's secrecy as to her having mortgaged herself would be inviolable, because she never talked about anything she did not understand ; and it immensely increased the pleasure of having freed her lover from his embarrassments at her own cost, that he was unaware of the circumstance. She would have to work, it was true, and to work harder than she would otherwise have done ; but work for one we love, even if we do not delight in the work itself—as she did—is sweetest toil. She had the utmost confidence in her own powers,

and, to judge by the verdict of the world, it was not misplaced. Mr. Rose had lost no time in making use of the privilege for which he had stipulated of making known the authorship of '*The Usher*'; and in a few days her name was in the mouths of all who take an interest in such matters, and of that still larger community who pretend to take it. There was not a newspaper of any standing which had not some reference to her, with more or less eulogistic reference to her marvellous gifts. Her essays were criticised anew and read—or attempted to be read—by the light of her novel. Characteristic touches were discovered in both, which she herself would have been at a loss to recognise, had her attention been drawn to them. But, while by no means contemptuous of praise, she shrank, with something more than dislike, from all public prominence. Acting on Mr. Argand's advice, which chimed in with her natural instincts in the matter, she read no criticisms on herself, whether favourable or otherwise.

‘The one,’ he said, ‘will only tickle your vanity, and the other wound your *amour propre*.’

For there were, of course, adverse criticisms ; her success had been so complete and immediate that she was already in the position of a writer of established reputation, whom all the poisoned darts (and even stink-pots) of envy and detraction are attracted, as by some natural law of gravity. Worse than these, though even more contemptible, were the personal observations in which certain journals did not hesitate to indulge. Some of them were even at the pains to compile—in different styles, and according to their own taste and fancy—her biography. In one of these the circumstance of her having been so long mistaken for one of the male sex was ascribed to a way she had, in common with a great female novelist in France, of going about in men’s clothes. In another she was the daughter of an Archbishop (who had secretly married beneath him), and had taken to light literature and pronounced opinions in

revenge for his declining to acknowledge her as his legitimate offspring.

These flights of fancy were occasionally mingled with infinitesimal grains of truth. One journal described her as a governess who had charmed the son of the house, who had, in consequence, been discarded by his father ; her pen now maintained her husband—unhappily, a *mauvais sujet*, who spent her magnificent earnings in every description of dissipation. Another was compelled, by a sense of public duty, to give the statement (which it had, however, received upon the best authority) for what it was worth, that neither the essays nor the novel, of which so much was talked, were her own composition, but had been written by her old schoolmaster, an indigent antiquary who, in total ignorance of their literary value, had sold them to her for five-and-twenty shillings the lot. In consequence of this interesting information, old schoolmasters and others sprang up like mushrooms in various places in the country, claiming their rights, and appealing to a

credulous public for a few shillings to keep life and soul together in genius wronged.

All this rubbish, however, only tended to raise higher and higher the flame of her notoriety.

The applications for autographs, for photographs, for ‘a few words in your own handwriting, expressing a sentiment,’ or for ‘a quotation from your admirable works,’ flowed in unceasingly ; invitations to dinners, to afternoon teas, and even to breakfasts, from the most high-placed Dianas—lion-huntresses of the first rank—rained in upon her by every post. Not only were all the proprietors of literary menageries in town eager to add her to their collection, but even those of the provinces. These latter, indeed, to whom the tedium of their existence had probably begotten a certain desperation, were more audacious and importunate than the others. She was invited to half a dozen country seats by as many female magnates, whose apology for addressing her must be found (they said) in the fact that, in the authoress of ‘The

'Usher,' they recognised, not only a genius—which, indeed, all the world acknowledged—but, in the highest and noblest sense, a friend.

If their tributes of respect did not impress Miss Elizabeth Dart quite so deeply as, in some cases, they were obviously expected to do, they afforded her very considerable amusement. As her address was unknown, they were all addressed to her, to be forwarded by the editor of the '*Millennium*,' who most bitterly complained of the postage. It was about the only thing, in those days, that Felix Argand had to complain of. Lizzie's love had renewed for him, not, indeed, his youth—for he was still comparatively a young man—but that light-hearted gaiety which fails and fades, on our road through middle life, as though the coming stupor of old age, beheld from afar, had palsied us with its prospect.

One day, with eyes that twinkled with fun, he brought a letter to her of the kind which usually came in packets.

It was an envelope, containing a dinner card, from the Dowager Duchess of Doldrum.

‘It is very kind of her,’ said Lizzie, rather coldly; ‘but I don’t see why it should not have been forwarded with the others.’

The idea of his having made an exception in favour of her Grace was very disagreeable to her. She exceedingly resented the notion of patronage under any circumstances, and that this example of it should have had the tacit recommendation of her Felix was particularly distasteful.

‘My dear, she is a Duchess,’ remonstrated Felix, wickedly. It was very seldom that he could get ‘a rise’ out of Lizzie, whose sense of humour was, indeed, much stronger than his own, and he enjoyed his opportunity immensely.

‘At all events, I have not the honour of her acquaintance,’ was the frigid reply.

‘That is why she seeks it, I suppose. I did not bring her invitation “with the others,” as you call them, because she herself enjoined me to place it in your hands.’

‘ Oh, she is a friend of your own, is she ? ’  
exclaimed Lizzie, with an air of relief.

‘ There is as much friendship between us as is possible between persons of such different positions in life. I am sometimes asked to “at-homes” at Doldrum House. We are not absolutely confidential, though she sometimes bows to me quite sweetly in the Park when there is no one looking.’

‘ You are going yourself, however, I suppose, to this dinner ? ’

‘ I ? Certainly not. There is a reception in the evening, however, to which I am invited—you must remember, my darling’ (for Lizzie looked very much ruffled), ‘ that her Grace is quite unaware of our engagement.’

‘ Does she ask me, then, to come alone ? ’

‘ No ; she has very kindly included Joanna in the invitation. I have another card here, which I am to give her if you accept, but not otherwise.’

‘ Then I consider this lady exceedingly impertinent.’

‘ My dear, she is a Duchess.’

‘I shall certainly not go, Felix.’

‘Then I think you will make a mistake, my love. In my opinion, you should never lose an opportunity of a new experience.’

‘Copy!’ exclaimed Lizzie, with indignation. ‘I am not a newspaper reporter. If I went on those grounds, I should indeed be a fitting guest for such a hostess.’

‘My dear Lizzie, do be reasonable. There is, in the first place, no obligation in the matter; or, if any, it lies on her Grace’s side. If her own admiration for genius is not very genuine, you will meet others at her house of another calibre. I don’t pretend that it will be a new world to you. A palace, a host of servants, and an interminable dinner do not, as is too commonly supposed, constitute a Paradise; the company that is, *par excellence*, termed brilliant, is often, no doubt, exceedingly dull; but still, it will be an experience to meet them. The only commoner besides Joanna and yourself will probably be Sir David Dredge, for I met him in the street just now, and he told me he was going.’

‘Sir David Dredge—is that the doctor?’

‘Yes; he has just been made a Baronet: a very quaint old fellow, one of the few men in his profession who takes a real interest in literature. If you had heard him when he raved about “The Usher” I am sure you would like to meet him,’ added Felix, slyly.

‘I think I’ll go,’ observed Lizzie, thoughtfully.

Felix stared at her, amazed.

‘Yes, there is much in what you have urged; and I don’t mind being dazzled, just for once. But do you think Joanna will go?’

‘To dinner at Doldrum House? With peas in her shoes, if that was obligatory. In matters of social rank, all women——’ He hesitated, then stopped abruptly.

‘Yes? You were about to make an observation,’ observed Lizzie, sweetly.

‘No, an exception. I was about to say that all the women I have ever met, except yourself, are more or less weak about titles. Even titled women themselves are weak about

them. I know a Countess who always speaks of her own husband—it sounds like a sarcasm, for she henpecks him—as “My Lord.”’

‘ Well, now you will have to make no exception, even of me, Felix ; for I am going to Doldrum House, you see, after all.’

Accordingly, at the appointed day, to Doldrum House the two ladies went. The Duchess was a good woman, in her way ; good-tempered, unless crossed by anybody ; homely at heart, in spite of the pomp that surrounded her ; and with a determination of spirit that was very highly spoken of by those who did not suffer from it. Her manner was natural—as it is not difficult for people’s manner to be who have everything their own way—and was much admired. There were many persons of high rank at the banquet ; but Miss Dart was the guest of the evening, and her hostess called her ‘ my dear.’

‘ You shall sit next to whom you please,’ she whispered to her while they were in the drawing-room. ‘ Dredge, eh ? ’ (I am sorry to say she ignored the new Baronet’s title.)

‘ You have got nothing the matter with your spine, I hope, that you want to talk to *him* about. However, Dredge it shall be.’ And the places at table were arranged accordingly.

Nothing was lost, we may be sure, upon Elizabeth Dart (except some of the entrées). She had the eye of a hawk, without its appetite ; but the person who most attracted her attention was her next neighbour.

He was a stout man, with a fine head and a very soft voice. There were members of his profession, less distinguished, who maintained that it was not always so very soft ; but, in speaking to Lizzie, it sounded like a snowfall. He spoke of her works with an intelligent enthusiasm which put it beyond question that he had really read them.

‘ Is the original of your delightful “ Bit of Old England ” a state secret ? ’ he inquired.

‘ Not from you,’ she answered, sweetly.  
‘ It is Casterton.’

He made a note of the name upon his

shirt cuff. 'I shall go there this autumn; without fail,' he said.

'If you do,' she replied, gravely, 'I want you to do me a great service, Sir David.'

'Consider it as already done, Miss Dart,' was the gallant reply.

'I have a dear young friend there—one Matthew Meyrick—who is dying of some spinal complaint, which he ought not to die of.'

'Who says that ?'

'Dr. Dalling, of Downshire. He told me there was one man in England who could cure him, and only one—Dr. Dredge.'

'Did he now ?' The physician leant back in his chair, with an air of pleased reminiscence. 'I remember Dalling. We were students together at Guy's. A man of sense and judgment. Unhappily, I have made a solemn vow and covenant with myself never to see a patient out of London.'

'Everybody knows that, Sir David ; and the country is jealous of the town in consequence.'

‘Miss Dart, I have found out what I should never have suspected from your behaviour here—for never did I see a young lady so much at ease in the social Zion. You are a flatterer.’

‘No, Sir David ; if I seem to be so, it is only because I admire your noble profession above all others, and recognise the head of it in yourself.’

‘Cannot this poet of yours come up to town, and consult me, like other people ?’ inquired the doctor, with a pretence of irritation.

‘No. I have forgotten to give him what will be the very best passport to your help. He is very poor.’

‘For the first time in my life, Miss Dart, I may truly say that I am sorry for the resolution I have made, and which I cannot break—even for your sake ; if it was known that I visited this gentleman in the country professionally—’

‘I wouldn’t ask you to do such a thing for worlds !’ interrupted Miss Dart, simply.

‘ You must visit him as a friend, of course, and cure him for nothing.’

‘ I never thought of that! ’ exclaimed the physician ; and, indeed, it was probable that the idea had all the attraction of novelty for him. It was said of Sir David that, on being appealed to, on a certain occasion which seemed to demand some abatement, to reduce a fee in three figures, he had magnanimously replied, ‘ I will make it pounds instead of guineas ’ ; but, as a rule, he surpassed Shylock by demanding more than his pound. There were plenty of unfashionable physicians, he used to say, who were quite justified in prescribing gratuitously ; but, for his part, his fees were a part of his reputation, and he couldn’t afford it. It was the first time for a quarter of a century that he had made an exception to this admirable rule. He flattered himself he was doing it solely to oblige a young woman of genius, of whom all the town was talking ; he was quite unaware that, like the trout à la Doldrum he had been just discussing, he had been tickled and landed.

When Miss Dart took her leave of her hostess that night, 'I have enjoyed your company very much, my dear,' said the Duchess, an inversion of the usual forms of hospitality which amused her guest immensely. She, too, had good reason to be satisfied with her entertainment at Doldrum House, for she had succeeded beyond her expectations in attaining the object which alone had attracted her thither.

## CHAPTER L.

## STRUCK DOWN.

THERE are two things—accident and illness—which, though common enough in human life, are always more or less left out of our calculations. We see them happening on all sides to our friends, we know that any day they may happen to ourselves, and we may even make such feeble provision against them as is possible. But it is our secret hope that we shall ourselves escape these misfortunes, to which, after all, flesh is not necessarily the heir, but only a possible legatee. When they do happen, they fall on one class with comparative lightness ; and on another, with terrific force. Those who have capital, on the interest of which they live, and who, dying, can bequeath it to their children, are out of

reach of the worst effect of these calamities ; they may be tortured, they may be crippled, but there is no necessity for the maimed limbs to work, for the fevered brain to think for others ; their dear ones are materially no worse off than they were in consequence of the blow that has been dealt to themselves. It is for the bread-winner that accident and illness have the gravest and most crushing consequences. To be paralysed, and yet to feel the necessity for exertion, is the most distressing position in which poor human nature can be placed. The intense egotism of philosophy avails us nothing under such circumstances ; nay, even the resignation born of religion is powerless to console us, since our unavailing tears fall not for ourselves only, but for others.

Were we always looking from side to side for these misfortunes, like one who treads a crowded crossing, life would be unendurable ; but, at the same time, the unexpectedness of their occurrence adds to the force of the shock. To-day, the lawyer, the man of business, or

the author, may be said to be more or less prosperous ; to-morrow, he lies with broken bones or broken health ; and, above all, with the terrible consciousness of every-day vanishing means. Of the three, the author is in the worst case, since he has no partner to carry on his trade, and no 'good-will' to dispose of : both principal and income, save under circumstances which are only too exceptional, are gone together.

For some little time Elizabeth Dart had experienced such prosperity as rarely falls to the lot of man, and still more rarely to that of woman. She possessed a great and ever-widening reputation ; a future of unexampled brilliancy, in the case of one of her age and sex, lay before her, and of this she felt assured ; she had no doubt of her own powers ; she was conscious that she had only just begun to draw upon resources that were practically without limit. All that was brightest, and much that was best in society, were eager for her company under their own roof ; while an invitation from herself was a social distinc-

tion. She had temporarily taken a small but pretty house in Kilburn, with a charming garden, which was Aunt Jane's paradise. Mr. Argand had arranged with his landlord to retain possession of his house in Harewood Square, so that the two families (if they could be called such) were still neighbours. It need scarcely be said that they saw a great deal of one another. They might be said, indeed, to possess in common a town house and a country house ; but, on account of the time of year—for it was still early autumn—they were more often at the latter than the former. Mr. Argand and Lizzie were to be married at Christmas ; the bridegroom would have preferred an earlier date, but she had reasons, known only to herself, for deferring his felicity to the end of the year. She wished to come to him free from debt. Until she had finished her new book, and had thereby discharged her obligation to Mr. Rose, she felt that she had not leisure to be happy. Their engagement, however, was announced, and increased the interest which was felt in her. It was univer-

sally agreed that so fitting a match gave quite a colour to the old belief (so fast, alas! dying out) that marriages are made in heaven. Felix Argand had a striking individuality of his own, and was widely known and deservedly popular. While every one congratulated him, a few who knew him well congratulated her; and it was their felicitations, we may be sure, which gave the most pleasure. Happy in herself, in her lover, in her surroundings of all kinds, her cup of pleasure had been filled to the brim by good news from Casterton. The day after meeting Sir David at Doldrum House she had sent him a copy of Matthew's poems, with a letter reminding him of his promise; and the physician had been as good as his word. He had spent most of the short holiday he allowed himself at Casterton, and made great friends with the invalid, visiting him almost daily.

‘Your young friend,’ he wrote, confidentially, to Miss Dart, from the Welcome, ‘interests me, you will be pleased to hear, more than his malady. There are, in my opinion,

no insuperable difficulties, such as we doctors love, connected with it. I cannot say that he has been treated for it improperly, for he has not been treated at all. Time and the chapter of accidents are excellent things to trust to ; but it is hard on science to ignore her powers and despise her assistance altogether. To leave everything to Nature is the simplest of remedies ; but (strictly between ourselves) she is not always bent on remedy. If she has any good intentions, it is, on the other hand, well to supplement them a little. This is what I hope I have done. There are certain resemblances in the case in question to a serious, perhaps incurable, form of myelitis ; but I have reason to hope that it will turn out mere spinal congestion, in which there lies always hope. If the treatment I have suggested be persevered in, I should not be surprised, a twelvemonth hence, to see M. M. (excuse a literary style which smacks of the "Lancet") bestriding a steed of flesh and blood as easily as he now mounts his Pegasus. He has thrown up the sponge too easily. If a car-

riage with C-springs and a yacht were at his disposal, his cure would doubtless be accelerated ; but, even as matters are, you have good cause for congratulation. Do not thank me, however, my dear Miss Dart, till we are out of the wood ; nor, indeed, even then—for I assure you, without affectation, that the obligation will be on my side. The society of your young friend has doubled my enjoyment of this beautiful spot. No wonder that it inspires genius. I don't say a word about Miss Mary, from which you will draw, I know, the wickedest conclusions. When I reflect that I am doing my best to get a hated rival upon his legs again, I assure you I plume myself not a little upon such chivalrous conduct.'

From subsequent bulletins, after Sir David had left Casterton, it was plain that an improvement in Matthew's condition had commenced.

One morning Elizabeth Dart sat down as usual to her daily task, and found herself unable to pursue it. Her head seemed to spin

round, and she found it impossible to concentrate her thoughts ; when, with effort, she had written down a word or two, she was in doubt as to whether they were spelt aright. There are few veterans of the pen to whom these symptoms have not occasionally occurred ; but they alarmed her exceedingly. If the attack had been more violent, it would in some respects have been better for her, for she would then have been less conscious of her shortcoming ; as it was, she recognised, not only the difficulty of conception, but the platitudes that came of it. This circumstance would not have been a portent to some writers ; but she had never written platitudes. Any person of ordinary common-sense would, under such circumstances, have desisted from their occupation, but the more obstacles Nature interposed the more resolute she became to overcome them. It was as though, finding her mind a blank, she felt a necessity for supplying it with ideas ; but, unhappily, they would not come. Her brain, like a nervous horse whom its rider compels again

and again to face some object of its apprehension, became more and more recalcitrant. 'If I once suffer myself,' was her reflection, 'to imagine myself unequal to my daily task, all will be over with me: I shall become like those spiritless Bohemians who never wrote "unless they were in the humour" or could not otherwise obtain a glass of liquor.' The only thought she could entertain with clearness, and which came without invitation, was connected with her creditor, Mr. Rose. She had only written half the novel for which he paid her in advance; and if it was never to be finished she might just as well have written none of it. A small thing it may be said to disturb so great a mind, a trouble both in nature and extent contemptible enough to any one of even moderate means. There have been geniuses even, like herself, who would have regarded it with the most philosophic equanimity, but her nature was not only exceptionally sensitive, but singularly simple and honest.

It was her habit to be quite alone while

employed in composition : she could not endure interruption of any kind ; but she made an exception in favour of Aunt Jane, who would come into her room half a dozen times in the morning ‘to see’—very literally, for she never spoke—‘to see how her dear girl was getting on.’ On such occasions Lizzie would always smile and nod, and the little widow, much refreshed by these manifestations, would retire as she came, noiselessly as a cat. This morning, when she looked in, there was no smile for her : her niece, pen in hand, was staring straight before her like a sphinx. Aunt Jane, who had a certain superstitious reverence for Lizzie while at her desk, would probably have made no observation, imagining the attitude to be only a new form of inspiration, but for the fact of perceiving the MS. book in which her niece always wrote, upon the floor.

‘ Why, my darling, you’ve dropped your book.’

‘ It doesn’t matter,’ was the astounding reply. Even the Sibyl had a book (though it

turned out at last to be a very little one), and it seemed incredible to Aunt Jane, clever as Lizzie was, that she should be able to write in the air as though it were paper. There was something, too, strange and distract in Lizzie's tones which alarmed her.

'You are not well, my child ; you do not look like yourself.'

'I am not myself,' sighed Lizzie, dropping the pen and bursting into tears.

In half an hour she was lying unconscious in her bed. The nearest doctor was sent for. His face at first was grave ; but cleared, and became even cheerful after a conversation with Mr. Argand, who, with his sister, had been summoned at once. It was a case of over-work, he pronounced ; the brain had been taxed too heavily.

'I do not think so,' said Mr. Argand, who was not unacquainted with that subject, and knew the ease with which Lizzie did her work.

'Her nervous centres are disorganised,' observed the doctor, professionally, plunging out of the other's depth.

For days Lizzie lay in a high fever, not raving, but talking incessantly to herself. It was sad, indeed, for those who loved her, and had been used to her bright and thoughtful utterances, to listen to those bald, disjointed scraps : a thing quite as piteous in its way as though her physical beauty had been marred and mutilated by some hideous accident. Aunt Jane and Miss Argand were both born nurses—it is the birthright of the best women—so that there was no occasion for the services of any of those estimable handmaids of healing who of late years have robbed sickness of half its terrors. In their gentle ministrations these two ladies found some solace for the grief that consumed them, but for Felix Argand there was no such mitigation. It was his fate to watch the sufferings of his darling—from whose neighbourhood he could not tear himself away—without being of the least assistance to her. It would be too severe upon him to quote his own self-reproach that he was as clumsy as a cart-horse ; but he was certainly as nervous as a

thoroughbred. The very type of thought, his mind, accustomed to unfettered freedom, was now compelled to revolve in a contracted circle, like a squirrel in its cage. He could think of nothing else save Lizzie, and of losing her. He passed a week of agony, which was repaid by a single smile that she gave him as he sat beside her pillow. It was the first sign of consciousness she had exhibited, and the doctor drew the happiest auguries from it ; as it turned out, however, very prematurely. The patient grew better, indeed, in many respects, and even stronger, but there were certain symptoms which hinted of permanent mischief. She spoke little, and that in whispers, but a feverish anxiety seemed to consume her.

‘Is there anything that troubles you, dearest ?’ inquired Felix ; ‘anything on your mind ?’

She did not answer, but her silence was no longer significant ; a question had often to be put to her twice or thrice before she appeared to comprehend it.

‘ Do you wish to see any one ? ’

‘ Yes,’ she murmured, after a pause, ‘ Sir David Dredge.’

The physician came ; had a long interview with the patient, and afterwards with Mr. Argand. His face and manner were grave. There were peculiarities in the case that alarmed him, because he could not account for them ; it was not egotism, but experience, that caused him, when he was puzzled, to fear the worst.

‘ She is, at least, better than she was ? ’ urged Felix, pleading for a favourable verdict. ‘ It is something, surely, that she has recovered consciousness ? ’

‘ In most cases it would be so, no doubt ; but not in hers. She has begun to think too soon ; and yet to tell her not to do so is equivalent to telling an ordinary person not to breathe.’

‘ You don’t mean to say that her mind is reverting to her work,’ said Felix, in alarm.

‘ I am not sure. It would be as futile for it to do so, as regards the outcome, as though

she were to attempt to construct a watch in her head ; but I noticed when I spoke of absolute rest that she looked very troubled. Are you aware of there being any pressing need for her exerting herself ; the conclusion of some book within a specified time, for instance ? '

‘ No ; certainly not.’

‘ Nevertheless, there is something on her mind. I hope there is—otherwise, from what I have seen of her, the case is very grave.’

‘ Do you apprehend——’ In vain Felix strove to put his question firmly.

‘ No, not that,’ put in the physician, curtly. ‘ Nothing immediate ; nor, in my opinion, is she in what is commonly called danger. But for some people there are worse things than death.’

‘ You fear for her mind,’ faltered Felix.

‘ She fears for it herself—which is still more serious,’ answered the doctor. He walked to the window, which looked upon the garden, where Aunt Jane was gathering a few late flowers for the sick-room.

‘Now, if Miss Dart were like that woman, she would be well in a fortnight,’ he said, with irritation; ‘but, being what she is——’ he stopped himself suddenly, remembering in whose presence he stood. It was not the fact that his companion was betrothed to his patient that stopped him; Sir David was not much troubled, in a general way, by sentiment, but Felix Argand was a very considerable personage in his way, whose feelings were worth consideration.

‘I suppose that all reference to her former pursuits, or to books at all, is to be avoided.’

‘Not at all; encourage her to talk as much as you can, no matter on what subjects. Let her do anything she has a mind for.’

‘But if she asks for pen and paper?’

‘She will not ask for them; she is only too conscious of her impotence; that, if I am not mistaken, is what is preying upon her. She says to herself, and it is only too probable that she is right, “My occupation is gone; I shall never write a line again.” Nevertheless,

if she does ask for them, let her have them. She must be crossed in nothing.'

That very day, the sick girl whispered to Aunt Jane, 'I want to write a letter.' It seemed impossible that, in her condition, she should accomplish such a thing; nevertheless, the widow had her orders, and the writing materials were brought. She propped the patient up with pillows; and, with infinite labour, the task, which had once, alas! been so easy, was accomplished.

'Post it with your own hands, Aunt Jane; and let no one know to whom it is sent,' were the patient's injunctions; after which, her overtaxed strength failed her, and she fainted away.

## CHAPTER LI.

## DISAPPOINTED HOPE.

THE news of Miss Dart's illness, following so quickly upon the revelation of her supposed identity, had produced no little sensation, just as one stone dropped into a pond immediately after another has a cumulative effect upon its surface. It had assisted many a diner-out in the performance of his duty to his neighbour ; had formed the topic of conversation among the ladies in the drawing-room ; and even evoked a languid comment in the smoking-room afterwards. Society had been pleased to consider itself quite distressed about it. Scores of carriages, some even with occupants, had called to leave 'kind inquiries' at her modest dwelling ; and every post brought expressions of condolence and sympathy,

many of them genuine, many more spurious, but all significant of the extent of her fame.

These letters, at Aunt Jane's request, were opened, and—when necessary—replied to, by Mr. Argand; communications of a private kind there were none, since her personal friends were aware of her condition, which, of course, made it impossible for her to attend to correspondence. On the morning after Sir David's visit, there arrived a letter, which her deputy opened as usual, and of the brief contents of which he became possessed almost before he was aware. Perhaps, even if he had guessed its private character, he would, under the circumstances, have been justified in reading it; at all events, as matters turned out, it was well indeed that he did so.

‘Dear Miss Dart,’ it began, ‘I beg to acknowledge your favour of the 15th. Every word of it does you honour, except so far as it imputes a somewhat impatient, not to say greedy, disposition to your humble servant. Two thousand pounds is two thousand

pounds, and I should, of course, be loth to lose it; but, in spite of your forebodings, I shall beg leave to continue to look upon it as in safe hands. At all events, for the present, there is not the slightest need to distress yourself about the matter. Three months hence, or even a later date, will be time enough to consider the subject from the point of view of your kind communication. Pray keep your mind at ease as far as I am concerned, and devote yourself to regaining that health and strength to your recovery of which so many thousands are looking forward with selfish hopes, besides yours, most faithfully,

ALEXANDER ROSE.

In five minutes, Mr. Argand, with the letter in his pocket, was in a hansom on his way to Paternoster-row; and that he had lost no time, nor stopped to speak of the matter to any one in the house, was fortunate; for hardly had he left the house before Aunt Jane came down, at the patient's request, to know if there was any communication from Mr.

Rose. He found the publisher at his office, and obtained from him, though not without much difficulty, the details of his transaction with Miss Dart. To do Mr. Rose justice, he was very unwilling to disclose his client's secret, even though it was to his obvious advantage to do so ; but to his visitor's authoritative statement—'I am engaged to be married to this young lady ; her affairs are my affairs, and her debts are my debts'—there could, of course, be but one reply. Mr. Argand received it with an emotion that quite affected the kind-hearted publisher, and the sight of which would have facilitated subsequent arrangements more than he would have been willing to confess, even had there been any difficulty in the matter, which, indeed, there was none. Mr. Argand, on the security of the 'Millennium,' which thus proved itself almost as negotiable as current coin, became at once responsible for the sum advanced to Miss Dart ; and between them they concocted a letter which, placed in the same envelope, was simply substituted for

that which had come from Paternoster-row by post.

‘ Dear Miss Dart,—I beg to acknowledge (and here ended the publisher’s part of the composition) your favour of the 15th inst. I am sorry you should have troubled yourself to write from your sick-room upon a mere business matter. When you get quite well and strong I shall be happy to discuss it with you; but in the meantime, let me assure you that I have taken such measures as will amply insure myself against any possible loss as concerns the sum of money I advanced to you. I dare say this astonishes you, but there are a good many things in the book trade that would astonish you, if I were so imprudent as to reveal them. With the most sincere hope for your speedy recovery, ever yours faithfully,

ALEXANDER ROSE.

The success of this little conspiracy was much more satisfactory than that which

attends most pious frauds. Had Lizzie's brain been in full working order, it is doubtful, indeed, whether even the most positive assurance from a creditor could have convinced her that a debt could be discharged without any consideration having been given for it; but as matters were, no composing draught within the sources of the *Pharmacopœia* could have soothed her nerves as did Mr. Rose's quittance. From the moment she received it, she began to mend; and as time wore on, Felix supplemented the magic potion by giving her good accounts (quite justified by the facts, however) of the success of the 'Millennium.'

'If you should never write again, my darling,' he once said to her, 'there will always, thanks to you' (which was literally true, for but for her the 'Millennium' would have been his no longer), 'be amply sufficient for us to live upon.'

The way in which she received this news was corroboration enough, had he needed it, of the trouble that had so long consumed her.

‘Thank Heaven for that!’ she murmured, ‘for Felix, darling, I *shall* never write again.’

Her mind, indeed, for all purposes of imagination had become a sealed book. She could think, but she could no longer create. What had caused this, science itself could not explain, though it was by no means the first case of a similar kind that had been presented to its notice. What was still more curious, now that the necessity for exertion in this direction no longer existed, the desire for it had also vanished. That passionate yearning to express her thoughts on paper which had once compelled her fingers seemed to have died a sudden death. She once asked Sir David, who continued to take great interest in her, on psychological as well as personal grounds, whether, in his opinion, it would ever be resuscitated. ‘My dear young lady,’ he answered, frankly, ‘I don’t think it ever will. It is possible, on the other hand, that it may be so. If anything should occur to stir your nature to its depths—some great happiness, for example (for we will not speak

of calamity)—the magic fountain may leap up again with its accustomed song.’ ‘Then it will never do so,’ she answered, with a smile and a sigh, ‘since I am as happy already as it is possible for mortal woman to be’ ; for, as it happened, it was the eve of her bridal day.

This resignation to the will of Fate was, of course, a thankworthy circumstance ; but though dreams of ambition no longer troubled Lizzie, those which she had so often indulged in, as regarded the happiness of others, were abandoned with supreme regret. She had secretly promised herself to make the welfare of Matthew and Mary her peculiar care. The former was recovering from his malady in a manner much beyond expectation ; but, even if he grew strong and well, how could he ask his beloved Mary to become his wife without the means of supporting her? It was to be feared, indeed, that he had only been rescued from the grave to become, with his devoted mother, the prey of poverty. She had, as has been said, been living on her principal—a

noble but most imprudent abnegation. She had said to herself, 'It will last his time'; and now, alas! without knowing it, the unfortunate young man was overliving that time, and his mother's means were well-nigh exhausted. Their position was worse than precarious, for its end was certain—it was hopelessly deplorable. Lizzie could 'rest on her laurels,' and even live upon them; but they could not sustain others as she had hoped they would do.

This reflection embittered even her honeymoon, some of which was spent at Casterton. Had an opportunity offered itself to get rid of Battle Hill, she would have seized it, so urgent seemed the necessity of having a sum of money in hand to postpone, till Matthew should at least have made a complete recovery, the calamity that was overhanging him and his. Not a word, however, did the widow breathe of her need, the pressing character of which Lizzie only learnt through her original informant Roger Leyden. The bride and bridegroom were received with the same

modest hospitality that had always reigned at the Look-out.

Mr. Snugg had good cause to congratulate his employer, though not himself, upon having got rid of all that well-known and valuable property commonly called 'The Loomp,' for there were no other bidders, and the time seemed distant indeed when the purchaser should put it to that use for which she had once so proudly intended it. The newly married couple had a fairly good, though of course precarious, income ; for who can tell, in the case of however popular a periodical, what a few months may bring in the way of disaster ? Their means had but a scanty margin. The Kilburn cottage was given up, and Aunt Jane came to live with them and Miss Argand in Harewood Square. In spite of much experience to the contrary in similar arrangements, these elements kindly mixed ; they were a united and happy family party. Miss Argand, though she tendered her resignation, and even pressed it, was not dispossessed of her position as the lady of the house.

Domestic honours were not such as her new sister-in-law had ever sighed for, while it would have been as difficult to rouse Aunt Jane's ambition in that or any other direction as that of a white mouse.

In literature, as well as in other matters, Lizzie continued to take the same intelligent interest as before ; it was but the creative faculty, which for the most part is only missed on paper, which had disappeared. Her sympathies were as keen as ever. She was even much agitated by an event that happened about this time, which might well have been supposed to have had little, if any, interest for her—namely, the decease of Jefferson Melburn. He met his death by violence at the hands of poachers with whom he and his keepers came into conflict in the coverts of Burrow Hall. The game laws was one of the many subjects which Miss Dart and he had been wont to discuss together, and she remembered well, how, for his own ends, as had so often happened, he had pretended to be a convert to her views. This, doubtless, made the

manner of his death peculiarly distressing to her. Otherwise, that he had left the world could hardly be a matter to be deplored. He had done evil and not good all his days, and had left evil behind him. He had failed in an attempt to secure Winthrop's money (who had fallen a victim to his own vices some months before), had speculated on its reversion and contracted heavy debts, which had to be paid out of the already deeply encumbered estate ; and the Squire was left with a mere pittance. It even became necessary to part with the hall, which was advertised for sale. There were memories about it connected with her mother which made this circumstance painful to Mary, though her father thought little of it. Broken in health and spirit, his pride was still stiff and strong, and in any case he would probably have shrunk from residing with narrow means in a spot where he had once held his head so high. He announced his intention of living abroad, nor did he express any wish that his daughter should accompany him. He had long, indeed,

ceased to even affect an interest in her, and was her father only in name. How much circumstances had to do with this it was useless to speculate, but they certainly had something. But for the need, or the apparent need, of a rich suitor for Mary, it is probable that this estrangement would never have taken place. How far our domestic relations are affected by external matters would be certainly a curious, and perhaps even a profitable, inquiry. Just now the hard results of poverty were pressing upon Lizzie's mind with painful persistence. She had known its harshness too well not to sympathise with its effect upon those she loved ; and she resented, upon their account, the palsy of those faculties which had once promised her such material advantages. If they had still been hers she could have relieved dear Mrs. Meyrick from her embarrassments—a term of euphony too often applied to ruin—and made two lives happy. For herself, she wanted nothing. Felix and she, though no longer bride and bridegroom, were still lovers. There was no happier home

than hers in the whole world of London, nor did it contain a happier woman, save for the thought of those for whom the cup of Life held such different measure.

## CHAPTER LII.

## THE HEIR OF THE AGES.

THERE was once a woman who, if we may believe the records of the period in which she 'flourished,' was the prominent figure of the day in literary society in London. She was not only studied in the closet, but held the rapt attention of thousands upon the stage. We have the written authority of one of the greatest geniuses of all time that she was the greatest genius of *his* time, and his view was more or less endorsed by his contemporaries. While still in her prime, her gift—we may call it by what name we please, for, as often happens, the opinion of posterity and that of her own time were at variance on the matter—was suddenly taken away from her; her popularity vanished with it so immediately

that we may almost say she awoke one morning and found herself unknown. For a quarter of a century she lived on—a charming woman, mingling in society as before, and in one sense even more so than ever, for she was no longer on a pedestal but stood on the same plane with the rest of the world. It is recorded of her that, under these changed circumstances, she was very cheerful and happy. It had been hitherto a case without parallel, but if matters should continue as at present, that of Elizabeth Argand bade fair to match it. She accepted her position with the like resignation; and if she did so now when the heavy hand of disappointment was first laid upon her, it was evident that with the lapse of time the weight of it would grow less and less. Indeed, what alone distressed her now—if anything of the kind could be said to distress her—were the thoughtless questions occasionally addressed to her, by those ignorant of the circumstances, with respect to her forthcoming works; a faint flush would then come into her cheeks, and she would make

some evasive and generally gay reply. Such enquiries were natural enough, but they used to irritate Felix exceedingly.

‘Good Heavens! Sir,’ he exclaimed to one of those impertinent questioners, whose thoughtless words he imagined had given Lizzie more annoyance than was really the case, ‘are you in the habit of asking the matrons of your acquaintance when they are about to gratify the world with an increase to their families?’

But in his calmer moments he confessed to himself that this was not quite a parallel case.

One day in early spring-time, Lizzie received a letter from Casterton in an unfamiliar handwriting. She opened it in some alarm, for she was always on the watch for the first knell of a catastrophe in that quarter, nor did the signature of the letter, to which she turned at once, reassure her, for it was that of Roger Leyden, to whom alone beside herself the state of the widow’s affairs was known. The despatch was a long one, which increased her fears.

‘ My dear Mrs. Argand,’ it began, ‘ a most remarkable incident has just occurred here, the results of which almost take my breath away as I relate them. But a few hours ago, in the early morning, I chanced to be on Battle Hill—*your* Hill. There had been a heavy storm during the night, but the wind had ceased and the sky was clear. Suddenly I heard a rumbling noise like subterranean thunder. Then, as it seemed to me, the whole Hill, like the wood of Dunsinane, began to move. It was, however, only a part of it, and did not include the summit, on which I was standing. The fir-trees were tossed to and fro as though a strong wind were blowing, though they were not more agitated than I. I thought my beloved Hill, or half of it, was going to run into the sea. An immense superficies, ten acres I should say, with all that was upon it was moving swiftly downwards, accompanied by a peculiar noise which I can only liken to that of a flock of sheep running in fright at the sight of a dog. You know there are a few firs in the extreme

hollow, only the tips of which can be discerned from the top ; I saw these disappearing with a sort of sudden but noiseless violence, as though they had been plucked up by the roots. Long and deep chasms gaped to left and right on which fragments of earth remained standing, still topped by the green turf. Hollows were raised to mounts and mounts reduced to hollows. Yet all this occurred in less, at utmost, than a quarter of an hour. Fortunately, as you will presently see, I was the sole witness of this phenomenon.

‘ And now remains the most astounding incident of it. As soon as the movement of the earth permitted it, I descended to the scene of desolation. On the upper part of the lower formation of the hill—which, you remember, is like that of a quatern loaf—a body of earth about fifty feet thick had been carried away. On the bed of soil thus left bare, such a spectacle presented itself as had never been imagined out of an eastern tale. The whole place was strewed with treasure. Diamonds, rubies, sapphires, and emeralds, all

torn from their settings—showing they had been no personal ornaments—cups and flagons of gold, tarnished by time and mould, of course, but beautifully embossed and carved, strewed the ground in all directions. There were no less than five crucifixes of solid gold, and one crozier of the same metal, broken, but set with precious stones. I cannot at present compute even the number of these objects, and far less their value ; but it must be something enormous. It is, of course, the hoard buried by Urfa the Dane—the spoil of the churches of London and Canterbury, of which defeat and death deprived him. He had placed it in the side of the hill next the sea, no doubt for the convenience of shipping it, and where, thank Heaven ! my lord never thought of digging for it.'

The reader here put down the letter in sheer amazement. Then a chill crept over her at the thought that what had just been described to her had not actually taken place. Perhaps the antiquary's wits had failed him, and he had depicted as an actual occurrence

what had, doubtless, presented itself to his imagination a hundred times before. There was, however, too much particularity in the narrative for that ; and, moreover, there was the landslip, which could hardly have suggested itself as a *Deus ex machina* unless it had proved to be one.

‘Notwithstanding the stupendousness of the phenomenon,’ continued her correspondent, ‘my first thought was of you and Mary. But for that, this sudden realisation of the dream of half a lifetime would, I verily believe, have shaken my reason. The question was how, having found this treasure, should the discovery of it be kept secret till it could be secured by its rightful owners ? I had no spade or implements of any kind ; and there was nothing for it but to take up the earth in my hands and therewith cover up the treasure which it had just revealed. As soon, however, as the news of the landslip should reach the town, the hill, of course, would be visited by crowds, and this precaution would be unavailing. Fortunately, it

was still early, and the noise of the late commotion had, as it turned out, reached no ears but my own. There was nothing for it but to hasten home and procure such bags and baskets as I could lay hands upon, and the services of a lad with a wheelbarrow. As I left the Hill, however, I met Harman, the miller, coming out of Casterton with his cart full of sacks. I knew him for an honest man, and at once determined to make him my confidant. Indeed, I could have done little without him, and might have lost all. I gave him to understand that what I wanted of him would be the best morning's work miller ever put his hands to. And then, taking half a dozen sacks on our shoulders, I took him to the scene of operations. Never since Ali Baba beheld the treasure of the forty thieves was man so astonished. I told him that it all belonged to the Crown—a treasure-trove—and that every article was sacred, which, in a sense, was true. This seemed to impress him as much as the sight of the things themselves, and a great deal more than the landslip.

‘Besides his sack, he had some twine, and we packed up between us everything we could lay our hands upon, and took it in the cart to my cellar. Within an hour all Casterton was on the Loomp, examining the natural phenomenon ; but the most remarkable of its incidents is for the present a secret, known only to your humble servant, Harman the miller, and one other. The one other is Mrs. Meyrick, to whom I could not resist the temptation of revealing it ; not for the pleasure of telling, but because I knew the weight of care which the knowledge of Mary’s good fortune would remove. You and she (as per agreement) are, of course, the proprietors of all this wealth, to dispose of as you please, after disbursing that “something handsome” which I have promised in your name to the miller. I have “consulted the books” as to your claim in the matter, and feel sure there is no doubt about it. I had, in my ignorance, secured you the manorial rights in the Hill—quite a titbit of legal literature, which you, nevertheless, had not the patience to listen to ;

but it seems I might have saved myself the trouble. The case stands thus: treasure-trove in most cases belongs to the Crown, which always pays an equivalent for its value upon the property being given up; in this case, however, there is no need to be under an obligation to Royalty, for when the said treasure-trove is not hidden and covered by the earth, it belongs to the finder, who, of course, is, by proxy, yourself. Heaven knows I never wanted a coin of it—and, indeed, there are no coins—there was no robbery on Urfâ's part at all; it was pure sacrilege. I never had any wants, and I have no longer any wishes. Matthew and Mary, Mrs. Meyrick and your dear self, can now never know the curse of poverty; and you are all of that sort whom riches cannot spoil. It will suffice for me to be acknowledged a prophet in my own country. I would also respectfully draw your attention to the fact that the stars have fulfilled their prediction. When they decreed you wealth, I was very certain that they meant something more than the fruits of

literature. They don't put themselves out (with portents and the like), as I told you, for a trifle. Matthew always called you the "Heir of the Ages"; but he little guessed how well the title was to be justified. It is now no longer a mere intellectual compliment. Centuries have given up their treasure to you, the Past has made you its residuary legatee. You will, however, I am well convinced, hold all in trust to promote the happiness and the good of others. I send you a thousand congratulations; and also, by train, lest you should fancy, as you well may, that I have been dreaming, a single sample of your new possessions, or, as Harman calls it, "one of the mugs"—a curious specimen of eighteenth-century handiwork.'

This letter had come by the afternoon post, so that Lizzie had not long to wait before communicating its contents to her husband. To him she felt they were first owed, since but for him she might never have become the possessor of Battle Hill. Second only to the pleasure she had of telling the good news to

Felix was that she felt in revealing it to Aunt Jane. Indeed, in the latter case, there were circumstances which made it even more delightful to her. It was, in fact, an act of reparation; for had she not once shown her the promised land (with a house on it) in vain, and unwittingly caused her a bitter disappointment? There had been a slip between the cup and the lip, but it had been made ample amends for by a slip of another kind. This was Joanna's first joke—'a beaded bubble winking at the brim' of her cup of happiness; and though her brother expressed an editorial hope that they might 'hear from her again,' it has been, up to the present date, her last. There was some contention about the division of the treasure—which realised quite a fortune—but it did not even attain the dimensions of a friendly suit, and was settled out of court. At first, Mary could not be brought to understand how any part of it came to her at all; but as Roger Leyden pointed out, with grave severity, if the agreement was void by which Lizzie became Mary's

coheiress, it would deprive Lizzie of her own rights, since the treasure would then revert to the finder himself ; and there would probably have been little difference in its distribution even if it had.

Indeed the greatest difficulty in the business was to get the antiquary to accept what seemed to all parties but himself a reasonable share. He was, however, eventually induced to take a sum which to him was affluence. If he did not hold his head higher in consequence he was, at least, brought nearer to his friends the stars, for, with a portion of the money, he built an enormous telescope, which was the wonder of the neighbourhood.

None but himself knew how near the little household at the Look-out had been to ruin when fortune thus stepped in and saved it. But the change could be read in the widow's face. It was marvellous, to those who knew nothing of the care that had oppressed her, how she suddenly threw off the 'fardel of her years,' and became comparatively young again. Within the period which Sir David had

allowed for his recovery, her Matthew had completely regained health and strength. His favourite walk during convalescence was to 'The Loomp,' where, on the very spot where the treasure was found, a house was rising, under the superintendence of Mr. Snugg, for Lizzie and her husband, with special rooms in it, we may be sure, for Joanna and Aunt Jane.

The first use to which it was put when completed was to welcome the wedding guests of the young couple. That Mary should be married from her house was a pleasure that Lizzie had long promised herself, and, unlike most pleasures, it fulfilled all expectation. The guests were few, but never did happier faces beam round a breakfast-table. Even the Squire, who had come over from the Continent to do honour to the occasion, was wreathed in smiles. Mary had behaved to him with great generosity, and even offered to make such an arrangement as would enable him to reside at Burrow Hall, which had not as yet been sold. He preferred, however, the

life which he had chosen for himself, and which suited him in many ways. The family seat was therefore purchased by the young couple, who divide the time between it and the Look-out. To borrow a phrase from the Major's sporting vocabulary, you could—in summer at least—cover the whole of the chief personages of this history with a pocket-handkerchief, for they dwell only a few miles apart, even when they are not, as often happens, staying under each other's roofs.

Matthew and Mary have several children, all idolised by grandmamma ; but fortune has denied that blessing to the Argands. They are, nevertheless, a very happy couple. Half the year they spend in Casterton and half in Harewood Square. The "Millennium" still lives and prospers under Mr. Argand's management. What does Lizzie do with herself ? it may be asked. It is not, however, necessary to answer that question, since the reader, if he *is* a reader, knows as much about the matter as I do. On the very afternoon of Mary's marriage Felix found his wife at her desk in her

boudoir, the window of which commands, to my mind, the most charming view in England. 'That seems a very lengthy communication, my dear,' he observed : 'are you writing an account of our festivities to the *Morning Post* ?'

'No, my dear ; I am clothing the skeleton.'

Sir David's forecast had been correct. Mary's marriage with Matthew had stirred Lizzie's nature to its very depths, and the spring, so long sealed, had burst forth again.

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